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CONTRABAND;

OR,

A Losing Hazard.

VOL. I.

7

CONTRABAND;

OR,

A Losing Hazard.

BY G. J. WHYTE-MELVILLE,

AUTHOR OF "DIGBY GRAND," "CERISE," "THE WHITE ROSE," ETC.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



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CONTRABAND;

OR, A LOSING HAZARD.

CHAPTER I.

RAIN-CLOUDS.

“In confidence, Sir Henry—”

“In confidence, Mrs. Lascelles, of course. I think you can depend upon *me*.” And Sir Henry, as directed by a weather-beaten guidepost, turned into a narrow lane on his homeward way, while the lady with whom he had been riding, jogged her tired horse gently along the high road, absorbed in thoughts, pleasant, suggestive, engrossing—not precisely in “maiden meditation,” for she was a widow—nor yet, although she was nearer thirty than twenty, wholly “fancy free.”

Mrs. Lascelles loved her horse dearly, and had been riding him with the liberality and confidence that spring from true affection, in a lady-like manner no doubt, and gracefully enough, but with considerable daring, and no small expenditure of pace. The good generous animal had a perfect right to be tired, having borne his precious burden honourably and safely close to hounds as long as a stout old fox could live before them, and had fairly earned the caresses she lavished on his toil-stained crest and shoulders, while the hoof-tread of his late companion died out in the distance. Mrs. Lascelles, I have said, loved her horse dearly. For the first time in her life, perhaps, she was beginning to find out she could love something better than her horse.

The light waned rapidly. Heavy clouds, gathering in the west, sailed up steadily on the moaning wind that so often in our English winter rises with set of sun. The day had been sad-coloured and overcast, delightful for hunting purposes, but for every other pursuit melancholy

in the extreme, and evening was drawing on, sadder, gloomier, and more disheartening than the day. Certain elms and ashes that skirted the high road trembled in every leafless limb, shivering and whispering together, as if they too were moved by ghostly forebodings of cold and darkness to come. Why should Mrs. Lascelles have looked so radiant and happy? How had been kindled that light in her blue eyes; and what, in the name of chaste Diana, could have occurred during a day's hunting thus to fix and deepen the colour in her cheek? Was it that she loved to recall the stirring memories of the last few hours,—the joyous rally of the find, the dash and music of the hounds, the pace, the pastures, the glorious turns and windings of the chase? Or was it that she had her own private successes to register, her own secret triumphs to record, exulting that she too had hunted her fox fairly in the open, and was running into him at last?

Rose Lascelles, like many another who has squared her life to the rule of expediency rather

than right, was a woman thrown away. An ambitious girl, in her marriage with Mr. Lascelles, now deceased, she had been guided by a desire for social advancement, rather than by individual preference, or even a taste for domestic life. He was young, handsome, agreeable,—a finished man of the world—thoroughly selfish; and some women would have loved him dearly, but for Rose Vanneck he was simply an eligible partner as heir to a good fortune and a title. So he treated her very badly, outraged her feelings, brought all sorts of people into her drawing-room, spent her money recklessly as his own, and finally drank himself to death, just six months too early to make his wife a peeress; having lived long enough, however, to leave her in the enjoyment of as comfortable a jointure as if he had succeeded to the title, and so far content with her lot that she appreciated the thorough independence of her position; for who is so completely her own mistress as a childless widow, young and attractive, with a balance at her bankers?

It is needless to say she had many suitors. Independent of her well-filled purse, the lady's own charms were powerful enough to collect men of all ages, stations, and characters in her train. The clear blue eyes so bright, so frank, might have seemed hard and cold, but for the dark pencilled lashes that shaded their lower as richly as their upper rims; the white even teeth would have been too broad and strong, but for the sweet red lips that disclosed them so graciously in half-saucy, half-confiding, and wholly winning smiles. There might have been a shade too much of colour in her cheek, of auburn in her hair, but that health and rich vitality so obviously imparted to each its lustre and its bloom. There was nobility in her arched brows and regular Norman features, just as there were grace and dignity in her tall, well-rounded figure; nevertheless, something beyond and independent of these physical advantages gifted her with a peculiar fascination of her own. She seemed to bloom in the natural freshness and fragrance of a flower, a meadow, or a landscape; bright and

healthy as a cow in a June pasture, a child from its morning tub, as Venus herself glowing and radiant, emerging like a sunrise from the eastern sea !

Such a woman was pretty sure to obtain her full share of admiration in any society. Perhaps nowhere would her conquests be more general and more permanent than in the hunting-field. When she came down from London by train for the enjoyment of her favourite amusement with the Bragford hounds, lords, commoners, squires, yeomen, farmers, and horse-breakers, combined in yielding her a general ovation. To break a fence for Mrs. Lascelles ; to open a gate for Mrs. Lascelles ; to show Mrs. Lascelles the narrowest part of the brook, or the soundest side of the ford, was a pride, a pleasure, and a privilege to "all who buckled on the spur." If Mrs. Lascelles had sustained a fall, which heaven forbid ! or otherwise come to grief by flood or field, saddles would have been emptied, stalwart scarlet arms been extended, and whiskers of every hue known to art or nature, would have

stood on end with dismay, ere a single hair of that dainty auburn head should have touched the earth.

Of course they fell in love with her by scores. Of course, too, the man who paid her least attention, the man whose whole thoughts seemed centred in himself, his boots, his horses, and his riding, found most favour in her wilful woman's heart. That was why to-day she had refused point-blank to become the wife of a much younger man, rich, good-hearted, actual partner in a bank, possible member for a county; that was why she had imparted this refusal, "in confidence, Sir Henry," to the companion of her homeward ride, and gathered, from the manner in which her narrative was received, hopes that sent the light dancing to her eyes, the blood rising to her brain.

What she saw in Sir Henry it passes my knowledge of feminine nature to explain. He was twenty years older than herself, grey, worn, and withered; showing such marks of dissipation and hard living on his sunken features as had

nearly obliterated every trace of the good looks which were now a matter of history. Twice a widower, with a grown-up family, an impoverished estate, and not the best of characters, Mrs. Lascelles could scarce have selected a less eligible admirer amongst the troops of light horsemen who aspired weekly to her favour; but she had chosen to set her heart on him nevertheless, and in her whole life had not felt so happy as to-day, when she flung down, "in confidence," the precious pearls that had been offered her, before the unclean animal, who should hereafter turn and rend her for her pains. Women seldom give away their hearts unasked. When they are so liberal, I think the gift is usually without reserve; though even if accepted, like many other priceless things, it is rarely valued at its worth. Sir Henry never told Mrs. Lascelles he cared for her; but habit is second nature,—and he had made so much love in his life that his manner to all women had insensibly acquired a certain softness and tenderness, which perhaps constituted the only charm

left by a youth spent in ease, self-indulgence, and the luxury of doing as much harm as lay in his power. She thought, no doubt, she had at last succeeded in winning the one heart she coveted; and undismayed by grizzled whiskers, grown-up daughters, or an impoverished estate, rode soberly along, lost in a rosy dream that caused the tired horse, the coming rain, the gathering night, to seem but so many delightful ingredients of a day taken out of Paradise express for the occasion.

Mrs. Lascelles, as behoved her sex and position, went hunting with becoming pomp, accompanied by a groom, whose duty it was, so far as his powers of equitation permitted, to keep close to his mistress during the day. In addition to this functionary, other servants were disposed and dotted about at different posts,—such as the railway station, the country-inn, where a carriage was left with dry things, the stable where her hunters stood, and the terminus in London, where a brougham awaited her return.

Altogether, a day's hunting involved the employment of some half-dozen people, and the expenditure of as many pounds. With all this forethought it was not surprising that she should have found herself riding home at nightfall, alone and unattended, perfectly satisfied nevertheless with her situation, and utterly forgetful of the groom, whose horse had lost a shoe, and who was to overtake her as soon as another had been put on.

So she patted her favourite's neck, smiled, sighed, shook her head, and relapsed into a brown study and a walk.

The rain gave her but little warning. Two or three large drops fell on the sleeves of her habit, then came a squall and a driving shower, such as wets the best broad-cloth through and through in less than five minutes. Even the good horse shook his ears in mute protest; and Mrs. Lascelles was fain to sidle him under the hedge, cowering for as much shelter as could be got from the ivy-covered stem of a stunted pollard tree.

People have different ideas of pleasure. For

some, the most uncomfortable incidents of the chase borrow a charm from the seductive pursuit to which they are unavoidable drawbacks. The infatuated votary accepts falls, lame horses, drenched garments, long rides in the dark, considerable fatigue, and occasional peril of body, with an equanimity marvellous to the uninitiated; and only to be accounted for by the strange perversity of human nature when in headlong pursuit of an idea. Perhaps, after all, the career of life is not inaptly represented by a run with hounds. Difficulties to be surmounted and risks to be encountered add infinitely to the zest of both. In each, there are unremitting exertions to get forward, a constant strain to be nearer and yet nearer some imaginary place of prominence and superiority—an emulation mellowed by good-fellowship with those whom we like and respect for their very efforts to surpass ourselves—a keen excitement damped only by vague wonder that the stimulant should be so powerful, by dim misgivings of which the fatal *cui bono* ? is at the root; lastly,

a pleasing sense of fatigue and contentment, of resignation rather than regret, when the whirl and tumult of the day are over, and it is time to go home.

Mrs. Lascelles, sitting in a wet habit under the hedge, neither drooped with fatigue nor shivered with cold. Her reflections must have been strangely pleasant, for she was almost disappointed when her servant trotted up with the lately shod horse, and touching his hat respectfully, suggested that the weather was getting "worser"—that the horses would catch their deaths, poor things!—that it was still five miles to the station, and that they should proceed—he called it "shog on"—in that direction without delay.

The groom was a sober fellow enough, but he had decided, with some justice, that such a wetting as he was likely to encounter justified a glass of brandy on leaving the blacksmith's shop.

His loyalty to his mistress and love for the good animals under his charge were, doubtless, not diminished by this cordial; and while with

numbed fingers he unrolled the water-proof cape that was buckled before his own saddle, and wrapped it round her dripping shoulders, he could not forbear congratulating Mrs. Lascelles, that "things," as he expressed it, "was no wuss."

"The 'osses is tired, Ma'am, no doubt, an' a long trashing day it's been for 'osses; but, bless ye, Ganymede, he won't take no notice; he'll have his head in the manger soon as ever his girths is slacked, and they're both of 'em as sound as when they left the stable. Ah! we've much to be thankful for, we have! but how you're to get to the station, Ma'am, without a ducking—that's wot beats me!"

"I must take my ducking, I suppose, James, and make the best of it," she answered pleasantly; "but it's going to be a fearful night. It comes on worse every minute."

James, who had dropped back a horse's length, now pressed eagerly forward.

"I hear wheels, Ma'am," said he, "and it's a'most a living certainty as they're going our

way. If it was me, I'd make so bold as ask for a lift inside. Ganymede, he'll lead like a child, and you'll have all the more time to—to—shift yerself, Ma'am, afore the train be due."

While he spoke, a one-horse fly, with luggage on the top, halted at her side, a window was let down, and a pleasant woman's voice from within proffered, to the benighted lady on horseback, any accommodation in the power of the occupant to bestow.

It was already too dark to distinguish faces ; but the stranger's tones were courteous and winning. Mrs. Lascelles had no hesitation in availing herself of so opportune a shelter. The flyman was off his box in a twinkling, the lady leaped as quickly to the ground, James signified his approval, Ganymede gave himself a shake, and in another minute Mrs. Lascelles found herself jerking, jolting, and jingling towards the station by the side of a perfect stranger, whose features, in the increasing obscurity, she strove vainly to make out.

Some indefinable instinct suggested to her,

however, that her companion was young and pretty. A certain subtle fragrance which may or may not be the result of scents and essences, but which seems indigenous to all taking women, pervaded her gloves, her hair, her gown, nay, the very winter jacket with which she defied the cold. The rustle of her dress as she made room, the touch of her hand as she took sundry wraps from the front seat of the carriage and heaped them in her guest's lap, told Mrs. Lascelles that this errant damsel, wandering about in a hired fly through the rain, was one for whom lances had already been broken, and champions, it may be, laid gasping on the plain. For several seconds she racked her brains, wondering who and what the traveller could be, where coming from, where going to, why she had never met, nor heard of her before.

It was not to be expected that silence between these two ladies should last long. Cross-examining each other with great caution and politeness, they presently discovered that they were both bound for London, and by the same

train. This coincidence involved, no doubt, a feeling of sisterhood and mutual confidence; yet the coloured lights of the station were already visible, and the fly was turning into its gravelled area, ere Mrs. Lascelles could divine with any certainty the place her companion had lately quitted.

“What a long drive it is, to be sure!” observed the latter wearily. “And they call it only five miles to Midcombe Junction from Blackgrove!”

Mrs. Lascelles felt her heart give a jump, and she caught her breath.

“From Blackgrove!” she repeated. “Do you know Sir Henry Hallaton?”

“I *do* know Sir Henry,” replied the other with emphasis. “I know him thoroughly!”

CHAPTER II.

AN ALLIANCE.

IN the boudoir of a dear little house, just far enough off Piccadilly to be out of the roar of its carriages, sat Mrs. Lascelles, "waiting luncheon," as she called it, for her travelling companion of the day before.

The ladies had been so charmed with each other in their railway journey the previous evening, that an invitation to the pleasantest of all meals was given, and accepted with great cordiality, before they parted; and the mistress of No. 40, as she loved to designate it, was glad to think that her pretty home should look its best for the reception of this new friend. A canary was perched in the window, a fire blazed in the grate, a pug-dog was snoring happily on

the rug, a bullfinch swelling in splendid sulks on the work-table: with a peal at the door bell this simple machinery seemed all set in motion at once—the canary twittered, the pug barked, the bullfinch subsided, Mrs. Lascelles jumped up, the door opened, and a footman announced “Miss Ross!”

If Miss Ross looked well under the dim light of a railway carriage, she lost nothing of her prestige when exposed to the full glare of day. She was pale, certainly, and perhaps a little too thin, but her black eyes were certainly splendid; while over her rather irregular features and her too resolute mouth and chin was cast a wild, mournful expression, half pathetic, half defiant, expressly calculated, it would seem, for the subjugation of mankind, especially that portion who have outlived the fresher and more healthy tastes of youth; add to this, masses of black hair, a little bonnet with a scarlet flower, a graceful figure, lithe as a panther’s, clad in a dark but very becoming dress, and I submit that the general effect of such an arrival fully jus-

tified the disturbance it created in the boudoir at No. 40.

Mrs. Lascelles, it is needless to observe, took in all these details at a glance,—she had “reckoned up” her visitor, as the Yankees say, long before she let go the hands she clasped in both her own with so cordial a welcome.

“This woman,” thought she, “would be a formidable enemy. I wonder whether she might not also prove a valuable friend.”

Then, sharp and cold, shot through her the misgiving of the day before; what had she been doing at Blackgrove, this dark-eyed girl, and what did she know of Sir Henry Hallaton? No stone would she leave unturned till she found out.

Miss Ross, however, did not seem at all a mysterious person, at least on the surface.

Before she had taken off her bonnet and made friends with the pug, she had already broached the subject nearest the other’s heart.

“You are very kind to me, Mrs. Lascelles,” she said, folding the pug’s ears back with her

white, well-shaped hands; "but I must not come into your house and waste your substance under false colours. Do I look like an adventurer, adventuress,—what do you call it?—a person who lives from hand to mouth, who has no settled abode,—a sort of decently-dressed vagrant, not exactly starving, but barely respectable? Because that's what I *am*!"

Mrs. Lascelles stared, and called her dog away.

"I went to Blackgrove as an adventuress," continued Miss Ross, in calm, placid tones, with no appearance of earnestness but in the firm lines round her mouth, "I left it as an adventuress. I can hold my own anywhere, and with any one; but I should have been worse than I am had I stayed a day longer in that house."

"Tell me about it!" exclaimed Mrs. Lascelles eagerly. "I am sure you are not—not—at all the sort of person I shouldn't like to know."

"I *will* tell you," said the other, speaking lower and faster now, with a bright gleam in her black eyes. "I haven't a friend in the world—I

never *did* have a woman friend; if I had—well, it's no use thinking of that now. Never mind; I'll tell you every thing, because—because I fancy I can guess something, and you ought to know. Have you ever seen Miss Hallaton, Helen Hallaton?—a girl with black eyebrows, and a face like an old Greek *bas-relief*. Well, I was to be Helen's companion;—does that surprise you? If you were a widower, Mrs. Lascelles, and had daughters, am I the sort of person you would engage as their companion?"

It was a difficult question. From the widower's point of view, Mrs. Lascelles was not quite sure but she *would*. Miss Ross, however, went on without waiting for an answer.

"Shall I tell you how I lived before I ever thought of being anybody's companion? Shall I tell you all I learned in a school at Dieppe, in a convent at Paris, amongst the strange people who struggle on for bare existence in the foreign quarter of London? I have sat for a model at half-a-crown an hour; I have sung in a music-hall at half-a-guinea a night. I suppose it was

my own fault that I was born without a home, without a position, without parents, as I sometimes think,—certainly without a conscience and without a heart! Yet I know hundreds who have been twice as bad as I ever was, without half my excuses. Mrs. Lascelles, I have been at war with most of my own sex and the whole of the other ever since the days of short frocks and a skipping-rope. Don't you think I must sometimes long to sit down and rest, to leave off being a she-Arab, if only for half an hour?"

"Was that why you went to Blackgrove?" asked the other, wondering, interested, a little frightened, yet also a little fascinated, by her guest.

"I was in London with a capital of three pounds seventeen shillings," laughed Miss Ross, "and a personalty of five dresses, two bracelets, and Alfred de Musset's poems half-bound, the morning I answered the advertisement that took me to Blackgrove. Can you believe that when I left it yesterday, I might have stayed, if I had chosen, as mistress of the house, the flower

garden, the whole establishment, and wife of the worst—well, *one* of the worst men I have ever had to do with? For a moment I hesitated—I own I hesitated; though I knew her so little, I could almost have done it for Helen's sake. Mrs. Lascelles, that girl is an angel, and her father is—is—not to use strong language—*quite the reverse.*”

Mrs. Lascelles was woman enough to defend an absent friend, and the colour rose to her brow while she thought how confidentially they were riding together along the Bragford road not twenty-four hours ago.

“I have known Sir Henry some time,” she said, drawing herself up, and blushing yet deeper to reflect that the “some time” was but a very few weeks after all; “I cannot believe him what you describe. You ought not to say such things if you have no proof of them.”

“It was to prove them I came here to-day,” replied Miss Ross. “It was to prevent a bad man from making a fool of another woman as he has tried to make a fool of me. Plain speaking,

Mrs. Lascelles, but listen to my story before you ring the bell for the footman to turn me out of the house. The first fortnight I was at Blackgrove I never saw the papa at all; and I honestly own I was becoming every day more attached to the eldest girl. It was a quiet, peaceful life; and what with the country air, the sleep, the fresh butter and cream, I began to feel quite strong and healthy. Sometimes I thought I was even getting gentle and almost good; I do believe I could have lived there with Helen, and looked after the younger ones, and gone to bed at ten o'clock, and never wanted change or excitement for years. I don't know—it seems as if it was not *me*, but somebody else, who passed such a calm and happy fortnight in that quiet old country house.

“But I woke up the first day Sir Henry came home. I was looking my best, and he took care I should know he thought so before he had been five minutes in the room. At dinner, too, he was perfectly odious, and the way he helped me to claret, after three hours' acquaintance, was an

insult in itself. Can you believe the man wrote me a letter that very night, and had the effrontery to put it on my pincushion himself after I had gone down to breakfast? Such a letter! excusing the outrageous nature of the whole proceeding, and thus showing he knew perfectly well how badly he was behaving, on the score, if you please, of his age and experience in such matters! He had often fancied himself in love before, he said, but he now knew that he had met his fate for the first and last time. He should leave home, he protested, that same day, and unless I could give him some hope of toleration, if not forgiveness, should probably never return, for he dreaded my displeasure more even than he loved the very ground I trod on, &c., &c. All in the worst and washiest style, as silly and vulgar as a Valentine! But he didn't leave home; for, to my dismay, he appeared at tea-time, on the best possible terms with himself, having been out all the morning with the Bragford Hounds, and lunched, as he told us, in very charming society at the 'Peacock.'"

A Red Indian displays, I believe, wonderful fortitude and self-command under punishment, but a woman tortured by another woman far surpasses the savage in the calm hypocrisy with which she masks and subdues her pangs. Not a quiver in her voice, not a shadow on her face, betrayed more than natural curiosity, while Mrs. Lascelles inquired, in a tone of perfect unconcern—

“Do you remember, by chance, whether it was the day of the railway accident?”

The day of the railway accident was impressed on her memory, less indeed by the collision, which only damaged a few trucks in a goods-train, than by an interview she held with Sir Henry after luncheon, in which he had given her to understand, as distinctly as he could without saying it in so many words, that amongst all the women of the world there was but one for *him*, and her name was Rose Lascelles!

“I *do* remember something about a smash that same day at Bragford Station,” answered Miss Ross, “and it seemed to me miraculous

that nobody was hurt. I only saw it in the papers next morning, for Sir Henry never mentioned the subject—I suppose he was so full of other matters.”

“What do you mean?” said Mrs. Lascelles, getting up to stir the fire, and so turning her face from her companion. “You think I am interested in Sir Henry Hallaton, and you have got something more to tell me about him. Frankly, I *am* interested—to a certain extent. Be as open with me as I am with you, and tell me all you know.”

Miss Ross took the pug on her lap, settled herself in a comfortable attitude, and proceeded calmly with her narrative.

“That same evening, when the girls went to bed, Sir Henry detained me, almost by force, in the library. Without the slightest reserve or hesitation, he related all the particulars of his interview that afternoon with yourself. He assured me solemnly, that you were avowedly attached to him, and ready at any time to become his wife. He showed me a letter you

wrote him, and a ring you had given him to keep.”

“He took it to be mended!” interrupted the other, with great indignation. “I never gave it him—I insisted on having it back that very day.”

“It wouldn’t come off,” proceeded Miss Ross, “for I own I was malicious enough to ask for it as a proof of his sincerity, and I couldn’t help laughing while he tugged and tugged to get it over the joint of his little finger. Then he told me that he had thought of marrying only for the sake of his daughters; that he had looked about him for what the advertisements call ‘a suitable person,’ and had selected Mrs. Lascelles—I use his own words—as a ladylike woman, with a good fortune, not at all bad-looking, and thoroughly devoted to himself.”

“Upon my word, I am very much obliged to him!” broke in the other, with but little more vehemence, after all, than the occasion demanded. “The man has lied to you like a villain! and his lie is all the more cowardly

that it has a certain leaven of truth. Engaged to him I never was; love him I never did; I might have *liked* him, perhaps, if I hadn't found him out in time, but there is no fear that I shall ever like him now!"

"All this fiction, then," continued Miss Ross, "served as a preamble for a proposal in form to the young lady who had entered his house as companion to his daughters, and whom he was bound, by every manly sentiment, to shelter and protect. I told him so, and he answered that he could in no way fulfil this duty so completely as by making me his wife. Then I laughed at him—I couldn't help it—and he looked so hurt and sad, for he's not a bad actor, that I almost pitied him for the moment, as you *do* pity people on the stage, though you know it's acting all the time. At last I got sleepy, and wanted to go to bed, so I determined to put him to a real test, knowing perfectly well what would be the result.

"I pretended to soften. I gave him my hand, no more, though he was an old player, and obviously accustomed to consider such con-

cessions the preliminaries of a winning game. Then I told him he ought to know my history; that I had entered his house under false pretences; that long ago, and far away (this is *true*, Mrs. Lascelles, but let it never again be alluded to by you or me), I had loved and been deceived, and could never care for any one in that way again. Lastly, I reminded him of his children, his age (I couldn't resist *that!*) and his position, watching him very narrowly while I shammed a good cry, and sobbed out 'Sir Henry, I am not fit to be your wife.'

"Then I unmasked my man, just as I expected all along. His face brightened, he never dropped my hand, he looked pleased and altogether relieved, while he embarked on a long and fluent dissertation, in which he insisted on the advantages of a protector and a home, on his own merits, on my friendless position, and on the reparation I owed him for his resolution at once to break off with *you*. Not a word now about matrimony. Oh! I was never deceived in him from the beginning—not for a moment!

“I told him so. ‘Do you think,’ I said, ‘after all I have gone through, after all I have confessed to you, that I have a spark of sentiment, an atom of romance left—that I would trust myself to the tender mercies of any man living, except as his wife?’”

“He turned pale, walked to the fire, poked it furiously, and came back, with his hands in his pockets, glaring at me like a tiger. ‘Then *be* my wife, Miss Ross!’ he growled. ‘You won’t like it, but I’ll do my best to make you happier than the others!’ He was horridly put out, I saw, so I made him a curtsy, took my candlestick, and marched off to bed. I locked my door, you may be sure, and as he was off early next morning to pay a visit in the neighbourhood, he came and knocked several times to wish me ‘Good-bye,’ but I pretended to be asleep, and before he returned yesterday I was gone.

“Mrs. Lascelles, you are the only person who was ever good to me without a selfish motive. I have tried to repay you, by putting you on your

guard. I can begin my fight with the world where I left off—I rather like it. But think of me kindly sometimes, and try not to forget our drive in the dark to Midcombe Station. I must go now. I don't suppose we shall ever meet again!"

But she didn't go, notwithstanding, for Mrs. Lascelles had many more questions to ask, many more confidences to receive, all tending to the condemnation of her false adorer, Sir Henry Hallaton. Tea-time found the ladies still in earnest conclave, and their intimacy must have been closely cemented, for Miss Ross had already confided to her hostess that her Christian name was Virginie, and that she was familiarly called "Jin."

CHAPTER III.

SIR HENRY HALLATON.

WARRIORS of long standing, who, like the Latin poet, have "militated," not without success, in many campaigns against the Fair, accept reverses, scars, and even knock-down blows, with a wondrous affectation, at least, of stoicism and unconcern. I have my own opinion on these matters, and hold that the raw recruit, though he may bleed more freely, may make wryer faces over his gashes, thrusts, and gun-shot wounds, yet recovers their effects sooner and more completely than the drier and tougher veteran. The heart, I think, is mended less and less easily after each successive breakage. At last, like an old boot that has been patched and cobbled over and over again, it lets in the enemy

with a sadly wasteful facility, and the careless Don Juan of twenty finds himself a jealous, fretful, unhappy, yet dotingly devoted Don Alfonso at fifty. There is retribution perhaps even here. A man who lavishes his money in youth, becomes the slave of a guinea in old age. There must be a day of reckoning for waste of time, health, intellect—why not also for a reckless squandering of the affections? Whatever may have been its practice, the moral code of chivalry was, doubtless, of the noblest and the best. Men little know what they throw away in that thoughtless prostitution of the heart which they are never taught to consider weak, unmanly, and dishonourable. They abandon the brightest beacon to renown, the surest guide to success, nay, one of the nearest paths to heaven. All these are to be found in an honest love for a pure woman, and all these are bartered every day for the smile of a coquette, or the empty vanity of an hour.

When it is too late, there is something very piteous in that longing of human nature for the



good and the true, which causes it to accept, with its eyes open, the false and the bad. A second marriage, when the first had been a failure, was described by a well-known wit as "the triumph of hope over experience;" surely the grasping at a shadow, when the substance has proved unattainable, may be called the anodyne of illusion for despair. "I only ask to be happy and to have every thing my own way," is the unreasonable outcry of youth, embarking on a summer-sea with fair wind and hopeful promise, though the golden islands are yet, as they ever will be throughout the voyage, below the horizon, and the safe anchorage of thoughtless childhood is already far on the lee.

"I have a right to be happy!" shouts manhood in stern defiance and rebellion, when the waves are rising and the storm darkens around, while he ploughs his way towards his aim by dint of ceaseless toil and weary watches, and heart-breaking efforts that are in themselves unhappiness and pain.

"I deserve to have been happy!" grumbles

old age, though the haven is at last in sight,—sorrowful but not penitent, regretting with revilings and maledictions, not with remorse and self-reproach, the fair opportunities neglected, the chances lost or thrown away,—ready on the vaguest and wildest encouragement to 'bout-ship even now, and, reckless of shrivelled sails and used-up stores, to put out into that dark, dreary, disheartening sea once more.

It is well for man and woman too to have known a deep, engrossing, and sincere affection; so elevating as to have ennobled their existence with its lustre, so strong as to have swept all rivalry from its path, so prosperous that they have never been driven to seek in paltry imitations some fictitious solace for its loss.

Sir Henry Hallaton had been twice married; first, in his early youth, when he became the victim of one of those women happily rare in our English society, who literally go about seeking whom they may devour. She accepted him after a week's acquaintance, and was tired of him in less than a year. Then she ran away with

a foreign Count, physically, mentally, and socially, far inferior to her husband; and in moral qualities, at least, *then*, not fit to black his boots. Who shall explain these things? Sir Henry had a shot at the Count, and winged him; but so madly was he in love with the woman by whom he had been thus outraged, that he refused to try for a divorce. Had she not died a few months later, he believed she might have returned to him—and he would have taken her back! This consideration somewhat softened the pain he was weak enough to feel in her loss. Then he married again a lady who was devoted to *him*, this time, and who bore him a family, of which his daughter Helen was the eldest. That he proved a faithful husband to this true and affectionate wife, I cannot take upon myself to affirm, but he was good to the children, and especially fond of his eldest. After a few short years he lost his second wife too, and now began the least excusable part of Sir Henry's life.

He was still handsome, with all the energy and most of the tastes of youth. He was gay,

popular, somewhat unscrupulous, and a great favourite with women. The married ones liked him well enough, in all honour; and of such he used to say, that "they could take care of themselves;" but amongst the unmarried, many aspired to legal possession of himself and his home; with these, unless he was much belied, he took cruel advantage of feelings he ought never to have awakened, and hopes he never intended to fulfil.

There were strange stories of Sir Henry's rides with Miss Fanny, and his walks with Miss Violet, of the pic-nic that got Lady Jane into such a scrape with her aunt, and the disappearance for several more hours than was decorous of a young beauty, once the pride of half-a-dozen parishes, subsequently ostracised for misdemeanours, in which she was far the least erring culprit of the two. Scandals like these, however, neither caused people to shut their doors against the reckless baronet, nor, indeed, brought him into such disrepute as might have been expected with that jury of

matrons who constitute the court of appeal for county society, and whose verdict in defiance of all evidence is almost always given in condemnation of the accused. Had it not been for Helen, perhaps Sir Henry, in an unguarded moment, would have surrendered himself once for all, to recommence his search after happiness in matrimonial fetters, calculated not only to impede his activity but creating much untoward noise and jingle in his pursuit. The image of his child, I believe, saved him many times from folly, more than once from guilt. The temptation must have been very great, the seductions more than ordinarily powerful, that could have induced Sir Henry either to abandon his daughter and his home, or to place another in that home, over that daughter's head. His last, and one of his most foolish escapades, had been a sudden infatuation for Miss Ross. He was also not a little ashamed of his discomfiture, at her cavalier rejection of his addresses, and masterly retreat from his house.

The morning after her departure Sir Henry

sat at breakfast, revolving in his mind many matters of affection and sentiment, which did not, however, seem to affect his spirits or his appetite. He was a late man, and his family, consisting of three daughters, for the only son was abroad with his regiment, generally dispersed to their several occupations before he came down. Only Helen, after she had ordered dinner and set the domestic works of the establishment in motion, habitually paid him a visit to pour out his tea and chat with her papa while he ate. To-day, she was later than usual, and her absence gave him time to reflect on his demonstration and its repulse. Strange to say, while he saw the folly of which he would fain have been guilty, and laughed indulgently at his own infatuation, there was a degree of soreness about his failure, more galling than that of disappointed fantasy, or mere wounded self-love.

“Can it be that I *really* care for this girl?” thought Sir Henry; “and if so, that I of all men in the world am likely to be baffled in my

pursuit? Have I quite lost the art in which I was tolerably perfect twenty, ten, ay, five years ago? and even if I have, is it not worth anything to know that I can feel as I used, and am young in heart and affections still?"

He would have got up and stared in the glass, deploring, as he often did, the wrinkles about his eyes, the grey hairs in his whiskers, but that Helen coming into the room began to pour out his tea and look after the comforts of his repast.

She was a girl to be proud of, ay, and fond of too. Miss Ross described her beauty graphically enough when she said it was that of an old Greek *bas-relief*. The features were as regular, the brow as low and wide, the under part of the face slightly prominent, and the mouth, when seen in front, forming that beautiful curve so rarely modelled but in the antique—such a mouth as denotes sensibility, firmness, courage, sympathy, and other noble characteristics of womankind.

In addition to these advantages, Helen pos-

sessed what are called "Irish eyes"—deep, soft, and winning, frank, modest, and full of intellect. I can think of no other epithet to convey their lustre and their charm. They were, probably, blue-grey, like Minerva's, but you never thought of their colour, fringed as they were by curling eye-lashes darker than her hair, and surmounted by firm, well-defined eye-brows of a yet deeper shade than either. She was rather tall, too, and handsomely formed, with shapely hands and feet; but the graceful figure suggested a fair amount of strength and energy, nor were you surprised to learn that she could ride, walk, garden, and milk a cow. There were few better waltzers anywhere, and no such skater in the shire. Moreover, though she never confessed to it, I believe she used to play cricket with her brother, and was an undeniable long-stop.

Sir Henry looked fondly in her face, and his heart smote him to think that he should ever have contemplated the possibility of setting any other woman over his daughter's head.

“Letters, Nelly,” said he, tossing her over a packet of them to open, while he proceeded with his breakfast. “The old story, of course, county meetings, advertisements for wire-fences, curse them! cheap wines; nothing from Harry—he never writes but when he wants money—to be sure that’s nearly every mail—and two or three tradesmen’s bills, which you may put in the fire without opening.”

“Why don’t you *pay* your bills?” said Miss Helen, who was rather fond of lecturing her papa; it was her favourite way of petting him. “You let them run up, and forget all about it; and then, when you want to buy a horse, the money is required for something else. Now, look at me; I keep the house accounts to a fraction, and pay them the first Monday in every month to a minute.”

Sir Henry laughed.

“How can I pay your debts and my own too? You spend all my money in soap and sand-paper, you little tyrant, and expect me to find myself in boots, gloves, saddlery, and the

common necessities of life. Nelly, you're the plague of my existence!"

"I wish you would let me manage all these things for you," insisted Miss Nelly, with great solemnity; "I'm sure you're cheated, papa, and you're far too generous and open-hearted. Besides, you hate accounts, and I *know* you pay them often without adding them up. How I like figures! I like managing—I like looking into things—I like having plenty to do."

"You'll have a house of your own to manage some day," answered her father gaily, "and a husband too, you little witch. I'm sure I don't envy him!"

But his face fell while he spoke; for he was thinking, when the fatal time came, what should he do without his darling, the light, and joy, and comfort of his home?

Miss Helen blushed. Perhaps she too had not been without her maiden dreams of some such contingency hereafter. Perhaps she had foreshadowed to herself the semblance of a future lord, whom she would tend as fondly and

love even more devotedly than papa. Perhaps already that phantom shape had been filled in and coloured, and appeared visibly in the flesh.

“Halloo, young woman!” exclaimed Sir Henry, tossing another letter across the table, “here’s something for you! An enormous envelope, stamped with the arms of the Household Cavalry. Bravo, Nell! Have they offered you a cornetcy, or a situation as band-master, or what?”

The blush deepened on Helen’s face till it spread to the roots of her thick dark hair; but she put back the unopened letter in her father’s hand, and, stealing round his chair, leaned on his shoulder, while she stood behind him.

“Read it, papa,” said she; “nobody in the world can have anything to say to me that ought not to come to you first.”

Again that pang of remorse shot through him, as he remembered his own unworthiness. “What a good girl I have got!” he thought; “and what a poor, irresolute wretch I am! I cannot trust myself for a day! I ought to be

better ; I wish I could try to be better ! Here have I been, ready to gamble away my child's position and her every-day comfort for the sake of a pair of black eyes and lanthorn jaws that I had never seen a month ago, that I don't care for half as I do for Nell !—that don't care a brass farthing for *me* ! And I'd do it again, I *know*, under temptation—that's the worst of it ! Ah ! I wish I had led a different life, for Nelly's sake. I wonder if it's too late to begin now !”

Then he read his daughter's letter, a correct and harmless production as could possibly be addressed to a young lady under the immediate supervision of her papa, consisting indeed but of a few choice lines, to express, with much politeness, the writer's intention of “ availing himself of Sir Henry's kindness, and of trespassing on his hospitality for a couple of days' hunting the following week,” with a studied apology for addressing the daughter of the house, according to her father's express directions, who had feared he might be away from home when the letter arrived ; the whole concluding with a vague

allusion to a ball of the previous season, which might mean anything, or might not.

“I told him to write to you, Nelly,” said Sir Henry, tearing the letter across and throwing it into the waste-paper basket; “it’s lucky I did, for I had forgotten all about it. And now I’m not quite sure which of these fellows it is, they’re all so alike, and they all ride chestnut horses with great liberality, I must admit. Vanguard, Vanguard,—which was Vanguard? The little fellow with light hair, or the stout man who spilt sherry over your dress? I believe I asked them all here next week.”

“Nonsense, papa!” replied Helen; “you’re thinking of Sir Charles Carter and Mr. Peacock. Captain Vanguard is the gentleman we met at Lady Clearwell’s, and who was so civil about his brougham when our carriage got smashed.”

“I remember!” exclaimed Sir Henry, suddenly enlightened, “a man with a squint—”

“A squint!” returned Helen indignantly. “Oh, papa! how can you say so? He’s got beautiful eyes; at least—I mean—” she added,

picking herself up with some confusion, "he hasn't the slightest vestige of a squint! And you thought him good-looking."

"Did *you* think him good-looking, Nelly?" said her father; "that's more to the purpose."

"I never thought about it," answered the girl, tossing her head, yet smiling a little with her deep expressive eyes. "He seemed gentleman-like and good-natured, and you said you wanted to be civil to him; so he'd better come here, I suppose, and I'll see that his room is comfortable and his fire lit—that's *my* department. Now, papa, if you mean to be provoking, I'll go and attend to my own business: I've plenty to do, and you're not to have any more tea. What an hour to have just finished breakfast! Shall I ring?"

"Ring away, Nelly," said her father, putting a cigar in his mouth, and sauntering off for his usual visit to the stables.

But Helen dipped into the waste-paper basket, and extracted therefrom the two torn halves of Frank Vanguard's letter, which she pieced to-

gether and perused attentively. Then she folded them carefully in their envelope, also torn, and placed the whole in her apron pocket, ere she rang the bell and sailed off on her daily avocations; from all which I infer that, notwithstanding her denial, she *had* thought about the writer's good looks, and was, at least, perfectly satisfied that his eyes had not the remotest tendency to a squint!

CHAPTER IV.

AMAZONS.

“My dear, the Amazons were quite right.” It was Mrs. Lascelles who spoke, sitting in the easiest chair of her boudoir, and listening to an account of those remarkable women, read aloud by Miss Ross. The ladies had not been studying Herodotus, amusing and improbable as are the anecdotes of that gossiping historian, but took their information from an author of later date, less quaint, more voluminous, and perhaps as little to be trusted.

Miss Ross shut her book and yawned. “I think they should have gone in for man-hating altogether,” she replied. “I am dead against half-measures, and I never can see why you shouldn’t kick people because they are down !”

“I wish I had always thought so,” said the other, with something like a sigh. “We poor women must learn to take care of ourselves. Well, I’m wiser now, and really, Jin, I think it’s partly owing to you.”

Miss Ross was still thinking of the Amazons. “Why didn’t they kill their prisoners at once?” she asked. “It would have been more dignified, and more—what shall I say? more *manly* altogether.”

“I think the other plan was better,” answered Mrs. Lascelles. “You see, they kept them long enough to make them unhappy, if they had no other motive, and then put them out of the way just as the captives were beginning to get attached to their conquerors. They don’t seem to have minded mutilating *themselves*; I daresay that was very natural.—Jin, I think I should like to have been an Amazon.”

“You’re too soft-hearted,” answered the other. “Now I could condemn a man to death with less compunction than you would show in ordering a child to be whipped. I have no pity for the

nobler sex, as they call themselves. 'War to the knife!' that's my motto!"

"I think I have been used badly enough," said Mrs. Lascelles, looking the while extremely prosperous and self-satisfied. "I am sure my early life has not been the happier for my relations with the lords of the creation. Two or three false lovers, my dear, and a bad husband, are not calculated to raise one's opinion of the race; but I am not so bitter as you are, by many degrees."

"Heaven forbid!" replied Miss Ross, while a shadow passed across her dark, expressive face. "I should be sorry for any woman who could feel as I do; sorrier still if she had learnt her lesson as I did."

She was silent for a few minutes, looking back, as it seemed, with horror and self-aversion, into the depths of a cruel and hideous past; a past that had unsexed and made her what she was now; that had caused her to originate one of the strangest compacts ever entered into by two women, and enthusiastically to abide by her own share in the agreement.

Mrs. Lascelles and Miss Ross had struck up a firm alliance, offensive and defensive, with the object of persistently carrying out a system of aggressive warfare against the masculine half of the human race. The elder and richer lady had proposed to the younger and poorer, that she should take up her abode with her, and be to her as a sister. In the world, Mrs. Lascelles gave out that Miss Ross was her cousin; nor did a large circle of London acquaintances think it worth while to verify the assumed relationship. They saw two pretty women, living together in a good house, remarkably well dressed, driving the neatest carriage and the truest steppers in London, going out little, but to "good places," and were quite willing to accept their own account of themselves, without making further inquiry. Everybody knew *who* Mrs. Lascelles was (it would have denoted rustic ignorance not to be aware that she had missed becoming Lady St. Giles), and, after the first week or two, the companion who went about with her was no longer "*a* Miss Ross," but had established her

position as "Miss Ross—clever girl, with black eyes—cousin, you know, of dear Rose."

So these two might be seen in the Park twice a week; at the Opera, once; occasionally at a ball; more frequently at those unaccountable functions called "drums," where hundreds of people congregate in a space intended for tens, and the world seems engaged, somewhat wearily and with customary ill success, in looking about for its wife.

But it was Miss Ross who had struck out the happy idea on which hung the whole strength and motive of the alliance.

She it was who suggested, that at all times, and under all conditions, as much harm should be done to the peace of mind of every man within reach as could be accomplished by two fascinating women, with all the advantages of good fortune, good looks, good taste, and good position.


"You've got the money, dear," said she to her patroness, "and most of the beauty, in my opinion, the friends, the foothold, and the rest of it; but, I think, *I've* got the energy and the

obstinacy, and my share of the brains; above all, the *rancour* that can carry us through any opposition in the world!"

So they started on the war-path at once, even before Easter; and a very pleasant "fillibustering" expedition they made of it. Not many scalps were taken perhaps at first; but the defences of the white man were examined and broken through, his habits studied, his weapons blunted, his mode of strategy laid bare. By the middle of May, sundry Pale-Faces were going about with strange sensations under their waistcoats, that only wanted a little chafing to become serious disease of the heart. The aggravation was sure to follow, else wherefore were dresses of exquisite fabric contracted, gloves and bonnets sent home, coils of fragrant hair laid fold on fold, smooth, shining, and insidious as the involutions of the great Serpent himself? It was difficult to say which of these two Amazons could boast the highest score of victims. Perhaps Mrs. Lascelles proved most successful in the massacre of middle-aged adorers, while young boys and old gentle-

men fell prostrate without effort, willing captives to the devilry and seductions of Miss Ross.

Amongst the eldest of these, and the wisest, in his own opinion, was a certain Mr. Groves, a relative by marriage of Mrs. Lascelles, who persisted in calling him "Uncle Joseph," a name by which he soon became known in the circle of her intimates. This gentleman, at a mature period of life, when years are counted by scores and romance is supposed to have made way for comfort and self-indulgence, found his defences suddenly exposed to the merciless attacks of Miss Ross. He liked it uncommonly at first, flattering himself that at his age flirtation was a harmless and pleasing excitement, which he could leave off when it became oppressive or inconvenient, and that, if worst came to worst, he was in good hands,—the girl seemed so attached to him, so confiding, so sincere! Uncle Joseph used to rub his bald head in his cooler moments, and wonder fully as much at her as himself; but, with the lapse of years, he had at least learned that it is not well



to analyse our pleasures too minutely ; and he generally summed up with the philosophical reflection, that there was no accounting for taste. If the girl liked a man old enough to be her father, why it only showed she was a girl of sense, who knew the world, "Ay, and more than that, sir, a girl who knows her own mind !"

By degrees, however, Uncle Joseph, having, it is to be presumed, forgotten the tender experiences of youth, was surprised to find his habits altered, his snuff-box put aside, his after-dinner slumbers abolished, nay, the fashion of his garments derided, his very tailor changed, and tyrannical exception taken to the thickness of his boots. He kicked stoutly at first, but without avail. He was never comfortable now, seldom happy. The clubs and haunts he had once delighted to frequent knew him no more, and he had taken to wander about the Park like a restless spirit, amongst boys who might have been his grandsons, disappointed, as it would seem, in a vague search for some object, which yet he never really expected to find.

So altered was the man, that he actually consulted an eminent hairdresser on the propriety of setting up a wig!

“Don’t be late, dear, to-night,” said Mrs. Lascelles, waking up from a fit of musing, possibly on the habits of the Amazons; “there’s nobody coming, I think, but Uncle Joseph, and he hates waiting for dinner. Perhaps he’s still more fidgety [when he is waiting for you.”


In Miss Ross’s black eyes rose a sparkle that denoted intense love of mischief, rather than gratified vanity or demure self-applause.

“He *does* wait for me, nevertheless, very often,” she answered; “and I don’t let him off because he hates it, you may be sure. Do you remember him that night at the French Play? Didn’t he get savage? And wasn’t it fun?”

Mrs. Lascelles laughed.

“You never spare him, Jin, that you must allow.”

“I spare nobody!” answered the other, and the dark eyes glittered fiercely.



Her friend looked at her with more than common interest, and something of pity no less than curiosity in her face.

“What makes you so wild, Jin,” said she, “so wicked, so merciless, so unlike other people? I love you dearly, as you know, because I do believe you love *me*. But why should you hate everybody else? Above all, why are you so bitter, so unkind, so utterly without heart, towards those who show a regard for yourself? It seems to me, that directly a man betrays the slightest interest in you, down he goes in the Black List, and you pitch into him without compunction or remorse.”

“Shall I make a clean breast of it?” said Miss Ross, drawing her chair near her friend. “You have often heard me say what a wretched childhood mine was, what an unhappy youth; but I have never told even *you* of the one crowning sorrow of my life, the one outrage that turned my few good impulses and instincts into ‘malice, hatred, and all uncharitableness.’ As a child, I had no parents, no relations. I was

brought up by a stern old woman in black, whom I had been taught to call 'Aunty,' but who was careful to impress on me, nevertheless, that I was not her niece; and I had no playmates, nor companions of my own age. I could have clung very fondly to anything that showed interest in me or loved me. I know it, because when I was taken across the Channel to school at Dieppe, I made acquaintance with the steward's dog in the steamer, and I shall never forget the wrench of parting with that friend of six hours' standing, nor the look in his meek brown eyes when I kissed him and wished him good-bye. I remember I cried for two hours, and 'Aunty' thought it was at parting with her. She scolded me without pity; but even then I was wise enough to know she would have reviled me still more bitterly had I told her the truth. How I hated that school at Dieppe, the *café au lait*, the long rolls of bread, the *bouilli*, and the fast days. The lessons I didn't so much mind, but the 'recreations,' as they called them, I thought would have driven me mad! I was quite a little

girl when I went there, but nobody petted me, nor seemed to care one snap of the fingers whether I was dead or alive; though they said I was pretty, I don't think I could have been what is called 'a taking child.' I was often punished too, and always more or less in disgrace for 'insubordination,' because I lifted up my young voice and protested against the injustice to which we were daily victims. The school consisted of French and English girls. I liked the latter least; they were the most prejudiced and overbearing, affecting airs of superiority, and calling the former 'foreigners' in their own country!

"When I left Dieppe and was removed to a convent in Paris everybody seemed glad, and I was delighted to go myself.

"Oh! Rose, you have never been in a convent! Thank your stars, my dear, or your gods, if you have any; and pray that you never may be. The discipline, the dulness, the wearisome routine, made one feel like a wild beast in a cage. I think I should have torn somebody in pieces if I had stayed. There was nothing to see,

nothing to do, and nothing to learn. Though I was such a little rebel, I had neither been stupid nor idle at school, and there was little they taught in the convent, except needle-work, that I didn't know fully better than my instructors. So I ran away. I am ashamed to tell you how I managed it—what lies I told, what feelings I simulated, what smiles I lavished to induce a young man, whom I had only seen three times and spoken with twice, to assist me in my flight. He called it 'un enlèvement;' but I think I managed all the details, and had, therefore, the less difficulty in giving him the slip within an hour of my escape from prison. He was a 'friseur,' I believe. He told me he was an artist. I certainly shouldn't have known him again in a week's time, but he was useful to me, and I think he said his name was Adolphe.

“No friends—no money. A run-away school-girl, and loose in the streets of Paris. Can you wonder that my wits are sharpened, my opinions somewhat advanced? I was self-reliant, however,

and had no intention of starving, so I pawned a black silk jacket of my own, and a bracelet Adolphe had lately given me. I regret to say the latter ornament fetched but a few francs. I had capital enough now to keep me a few days, and felt that I could afford to make my own bargain with an employer, whatever might be the task or the terms.

“Perhaps it was because I could do without it for the moment, that I obtained an engagement the same day to sing at one of the ‘Cafés Chantants’ that abound in the outskirts of Paris. In a low dress, at sixteen, singing to two hundred people I had never seen before, I give you my word I wasn’t the least shy. Truth to tell, my blood was up. I had detected in the Manager’s politeness, and the readiness with which he met my terms, something of that predatory tendency which I had already learned from books, from reflection, from the experience of others, affects the dealings of men towards ourselves. I was ten times better in defence, I knew, than he could be in attack; and I felt a

fierce pleasure in pondering how I could turn his own weapons against himself.

“So I ran through a succession of shakes, and squeals, and shrieks, and sometimes sang false, to the delight of an enthusiastic audience and my own intense gratification. One man never took his eyes off me; and, somehow, before I had finished my third or fourth bar, I found I had forgotten Manager, self, and company, and was singing to this man alone. When I went back at night to the bare little room I had hired during the afternoon, shall I confess to you that his face haunted me in the dark? and I dreamt of him—I did, upon my word—though I was so tired I fell dead asleep the instant I lay down.”

“My dear, you had fallen in love,” observed her listener.

“No, I hadn’t,” answered the other; “at least, not then. Next day I found a note and a bouquet from the manager. I did wish for a moment it had been from somebody else; but it proved to me, at least, I was admired by an old fool, who might have been my grandfather,

and so my vanity should have been gratified, but it only made me savage and irritable. I don't think I ever liked people one bit because they liked *me*!

“That evening the same man was there to hear me sing again. I confess my heart gave a jump when I saw him, and I knew that *he* knew it! He never applauded but once, and he shook his head whenever I made a false note. What pains I took, and how pleased I was, when he said ‘Bravo!’ out loud as I made my curtsy! I *was* in love with him that night when I went to bed, and felt I had a right to dream of him as much as ever I liked.

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“I wonder if he knew what he was doing. Sometimes I think men are often brutes, only because they are fools. We were married though. I protest to you solemnly, as I am a living woman, we were married in a church! I took his name, such as it was, and when next I sang they put me in the bills as Madame Picquard. He did not like me to leave off my profession, he said, and I would have gone out willingly with a rake and a basket to earn my day’s wages as a scavenger in the streets if he had only said it was a pleasant life.

“We were not rich, though he always seemed to have plenty of money. I lived in a very modest apartment, and I used to think I saw less of my husband after he was my husband. I imagine this is sometimes the case, but it grieved me then. I was even fool enough to cry about it. Fancy my crying with nothing to

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"Soon after this my boy was born. Such a noble little fellow, Mrs. Lascelles—so strong, so handsome, with beautiful little hands and finger nails as perfect as a model. My darling boy! He knew me, I am sure he did, when he was ten days old, and—and—it's nonsense, of course, and they hate one when they're grown up. But I wasn't such a bad mother to him, after all!

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“But I didn't get well. I was very young, you know, and it was weeks before I was able to walk into the next room, so that I couldn't accompany my husband anywhere out-of-doors, and I dare say I was a sadly stupid companion in the house. Perhaps that was why he got tired of me. How can I tell? or what does it signify? It seems as if all these things had happened a hundred years ago. What a fuss people make about their feelings and their affections, and so on! What is the good of them after all? and how long do they last?

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“‘I was quite prepared for this,’ I said quietly, ‘as, of course, you know. My husband and I have been on bad terms for some time.

You must be very much in his confidence, however, if he has told you *why*—that is my affair, so is the question of money; in that matter he has behaved well, but I cannot take it.'

"His fat, heavy face gleamed with absolute delight.

"'You cannot take it!' he repeated; 'and why?'

"Because I have no claim on him as a wife; because, morally, he is not my husband; because women have sentiments, affections, *amour propre*, egoism, if you will; *enfin*, because I love another.'

"But I was careful, you may be sure, not to tell him who that other was. Before he quitted me that afternoon he had persuaded me, nothing loth, to accept the pittance left by my good-for-nothing husband; though a fortnight afterwards, having been to see me every day, he was still in torments about the unknown object, growing always more and more infatuated, in a way that would have been ludicrous had it not been simply contemptible.

“I doled him out little morsels of encouragement; I accepted from him valuable presents, and even sums of money; I tantalized, irritated, and provoked him with the ingenuity of a fiend. I shuddered when he came near me, yet I let him kiss my face once,—my baby’s *never!* At last I gave way, with a great storm of sobs and emotion, made my confession, whispered that *he*, and *he* alone, had been the mysterious object; that I had cared for him from the first; that to him was owing my coldness towards my husband, our estrangement, and eventual separation. Finally, I promised to meet him the very next morning, never more to part; and within six hours my baby and I were established, bag and baggage, in the train for Lyons; nor have I ever seen my fat friend from that day to this.

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only nothing *new*, but nothing *good*, under the sun. If I were romantic I should say I was a tigress robbed of her cub; as I am only practical, I call myself simply a woman of the world, whom the world has hardened; cunning, because deceived; pitiless, because ill-treated; heartless, because *désillusionnée*. You have taken me in, and tamed me for a time, but nothing will change my nature now.

“The rest of my history you know; the depths to which I sank, the meannesses of which I was capable, the hypocrisy that re-established me in a station of respectability, and swindled people out of such recommendations as the one that enabled me to make a fool of Sir Henry Hallaton. As I told you before, my motto now is, ‘War to the knife!’ I might add, ‘Woe to the vanquished!’”

The tears stood in her listener’s blue eyes more than once during this strange recital; but Mrs. Lascelles brightened up when it was over, and pointed to the clock, with a light laugh—

“Go and put your armour on, my dear,” said

she, "and bid your maid look to the joints of your harness. We fight to-night in *champ clos*, and you have two champions to encounter, both eager for the fray!"

Miss Ross smiled—

"Let the best man win!" she answered. "He may find to-night that the 'latter end of a feast' is not at all unlike 'the beginning of a fray!'"

CHAPTER V.

À OUTRANCE.

No Amazon, I imagine, in the experience of Herodotus, Sir Walter Raleigh, or our own, was ever known to be careless of her weapons, suffering them to grow blunt from neglect or rusty from disuse. The boar whets his tusks, the stag sharpens his antlers; the nobler beasts of chase are not dependent for safety on flight alone; and shall not woman study how she can best bring to perfection that armour with which Nature provides her for attack, defence, and eventual capture of her prey?

Brighter or more accomplished warriors never entered lists, than the two now sitting in the drawing-room at No. 40: cool, fragrant, diaphanous; redoubtable in that style of beauty which is so enhanced and set off by art.

To these, enter a young gentleman, hot, shy, bewildered; who has followed into the room a name not the least like his own, with considerable trepidation; hardly clear if he is on his head or his heels; and, although worshipping the very pattern of the carpet on which one of these divinities treads, yet conscious, in his heart of hearts, that it would be unspeakable relief to wake up and find himself three-quarters of a mile off at his club.

Mr. Goldthred, whose announcement by a pompous butler as "Mr. Gotobed," had not served to increase his confidence, was by no means a bold person in general society, and possessed, indeed, as little of that native dignity they call "cheek," as any of the rising generation with whom it was his habit to associate; but on the present occasion he felt nervous to an unusual degree, because, alas! he had fallen in love with a woman older, cleverer, more experienced, and altogether of higher calibre than himself.

He had come early, half hoping to find her

alone, yet was it a relief to be spared the ordeal of a *tête-à-tête* that seemed so delightful in fancy. Of course, being her utter bond-slave, he paid his homage to Mrs. Lascelles with ludicrous stiffness, and blundered at once into an inconsequent conversation with Miss Ross. That syren took pity on his embarrassment—the pity a cat takes on a mouse. It amused her to mark the poor youth's efforts to seem at ease, his uncomfortable contortions, his wandering replies, and the timid glances he cast on the hem of his conqueror's garment, who would willingly have met him half-way, had he only gone up and flirted with her in good earnest.

“We haven't seen you for ages, Mr. Goldthred. What have you been doing? Where have you been hiding? Rose and I were talking about you this very afternoon.”

How he wished he, too, might call his goddess “Rose;” but she had been talking about him, blessed thought! that very day. His heart was in his throat, and he murmured something about “French play.”

“You can’t have been at the French play day and night,” laughed Miss Ross; “but I’m not going to cross-examine you. Besides, you weren’t asked here to flirt with *me*. I’ve got my own young man coming, and he’s hideously jealous. I hear him now coughing on the stairs! Only us four. It’s a small party. We shall find each other very stupid, I daresay.”

Gathering encouragement, no doubt, from this supposition, and emboldened by a fresh arrival, Mr. Goldthred stole a glance in his idol’s face while she rose to welcome Uncle Joseph. The blue eyes rested on their worshipper very kindly for about half-a-second. But that half-second did his business as effectually as half-an-hour. If Uncle Joseph was also shy, greater age, wisdom, and corpulence rendered him more capable of concealing such embarrassment. He shook his hostess cordially by the hand; he told Miss Ross she looked like a “China-rose,” a flower of which he had formed some vague conception, far removed from reality; and announced that he had spent his day in the City, and was

very hungry,—more like a man in business than a man in love. This gentleman took down Miss Ross; Mrs. Lascelles followed with young Goldthred, leaning more weight on his arm than the steepness of the stairs seemed to necessitate. He wished the journey twice as long, and for half a minute was half-persuaded he felt happy!

I am sorry I cannot furnish the bill of fare: Uncle Joseph put it in his pocket. It was a way he had, after perusing it solemnly through a pair of gold eye-glasses, with the intention of working it deliberately to the end.

A dinner organised for an express purpose is generally a failure. On the present occasion there was no particular object to be gained beyond the general discomfiture of two unoffending males, and it went on merrily enough. Drinking is, no doubt, conducive to sentiment; but eating has, I think, a contrary tendency, and should never be mixed up with the affections. Uncle Joseph, though far gone, had not yet lost enough heart to weaken his appetite, and young Goldthred helped himself to everything

with the indiscriminate and indecent carelessness of a man under thirty. The ladies pecked, and sipped, and simpered, yet managed to take a fair share of provender on board; and after champagne had been twice round, the party were thoroughly satisfied with themselves, and with each other. Even Goldthred mustered courage enough to carry on the siege, and began making up for lost time. Her fish was so lively, Mrs. Lascelles thought well to wind in a few yards of line.

“Either you are very romantic, Mr. Goldthred,” she objected, “or else you don’t mean us to believe what you say.”

“I wish *you* to believe it,” he answered, lowering his voice and blushing, *really* blushing, though he was a *man*, “and—and—I never used to be romantic till I came *here*.”

“It’s in the air I suppose,” she answered laughing, “and we shall all catch it in turn—I hope it isn’t painful! I sometimes think it must be, unless one has it in the mildest form. We’ll ask Miss Ross. Jin, dear, Mr. Gold-

thred wants to know if you've any romance about you. I tell him I don't think you've an atom."

"How can you say so!" exclaimed Miss Ross. "Don't you know my especial weakness? Can't anybody see I'm heart all over?"

Uncle Joseph looked up from his cutlet, masticating steadily the while, and his grave eyes rested on the dark, meaning face of the lady by his side. Their gaze indicated surprise, incredulity, and the least touch of scorn.

She was a beautiful fighter, she had practised so much, and knew exactly when and how to return. Shooting one reproachful glance from her large dark eyes full into his own, under cover of the others' voices she murmured two words,—“Strangers yet!”

It was the title of a song she sang to him only the day before in the boudoir; a song into which she put all the wild, tender pathos of her flexible and expressive voice. Its burden had been ringing in his ears half-an-hour ago, while he dressed for dinner.

The round, you see, was a short one; but Uncle Joseph caught it heavily and went down! To borrow the language of the prize-ring—
“First blood for Miss Ross.”

He came up smiling nevertheless, and finished his glass of champagne.

“I wish you were a little plainer, Miss Ross. I’m not paying you a compliment, or I should say you could easily afford to be a great deal plainer than you are. I mean what I say.”

“And I mean what I say too—sometimes,” she whispered, drooping her thick black eye-lashes. “I don’t think I should like to be thought so very plain by *you*.”

Uncle Joseph went down again, having received, I fancy, no less punishment in this round than the last.

Meanwhile young Goldthred, fortified by refreshment, and further stimulated by the interest Mrs. Lascelles either felt or affected, embarked on a touching recital of his pursuits, belongings, and general private history. He described in turn, and with strict attention to details, his

schooner, his tax-cart, and his poodle ; enlarging on the trim and rigging of the first, the varnish of the second, the elaborate shaving of the third—and, indeed, almost soared into eloquence about his dog.

“It shows he has a good heart,” thought the listener ; “but none the less must he take his punishment like the rest !”

With a little more champagne he glided, by an easy transition, into his possessions, his expectations, his prospects in general ; why he had done well in “Spanish,” what a mess he had made of “Peruvians,” the advantage of early information about American politics, and how nearly he had missed a great uncle’s munificent bequest by exposing his ignorance of the French *Credit Mobilier*. He was not quite a fool, however, and stopped himself with a laugh.

“What a bore you will think me, Mrs. Lascelles,” said he. “One is so apt to fancy everybody is interested in what one cares for oneself.”

“I am,” she answered, with her brightest, kindest look. “I always want to know

everything about people I like. When they leave the stage I follow them in fancy behind the scenes, and I *do* think I should feel hurt if I believed they were really so different without their rouge, wigs, padding, and false calves."

"It's not, 'Out of sight, out of mind' with you, eh?" observed the young gentleman in considerable trepidation. To do him justice, he saw his opportunity, but could make no more of it than the above.

"Do you think it is?" she returned. "And what would one be worth if it was? How little people know each other. We all seem to go about with masks for faces. I daresay mine is like the rest, but I would take it off in a minute if I was asked."


Another opening for Goldthred. He felt full of sentiment, up to his eye-lids; was, indeed, choking with it, but somehow it wouldn't come out.

"I've never been to a regular masquerade," said he simply; "I should think it was capital fun."

Miss Ross, whom nothing escaped, whatever she had on hand, saw his discomfiture, and came to the rescue.

“You’re at one every day of your life,” she broke in. “Rose is quite right. Nobody speaks the whole truth, except Mr. Groves, who has just told me I’m hideous. You know you did, and you think you’re a capital judge. I shall not forgive you till after coffee. I must say I can’t agree with Rose about one’s friends. As for mine, with a few brilliant exceptions, the less I see of them the better I like it.”

“If that’s the case, Jin, we’ll go up-stairs,” said the hostess, rising slowly and gracefully, as she fastened the last button of her glove. “Uncle Joseph,” she added, with her sweetest smile, “you’re at home, you know. You must take care of Mr. Goldthred;” and so swept out, keeping the blue eyes Goldthred so admired steadily averted from his eager face. He returned to the table after shutting the door quite crest-fallen and disappointed. He had counted on one more look to carry him through



the tedious half-hour that must intervene ere he could see her again, and she probably knew this as well as he did. Ladies are sometimes exceedingly liberal of such small encouragements; sometimes, as if from mere caprice, withhold them altogether. No doubt they adapt their treatment to the symptoms shown by the sufferer.

It *was* a long half-hour for the two gentlemen thus left over their dessert, without a subject of interest in common. Uncle Joseph's mature prudence, over-reaching itself, mistrusted a single lady's cellar, and he stuck faithfully to pale sherry; while Goldthred, with youthful temerity, dashed boldly at the claret, and was rewarded by finding an exceedingly sound and fragrant vintage. Not that he knew the least what he was drinking, but swallowed sweetmeats and filled bumpers with a nervous impatience for release, that lengthened every minute into ten. The other, wondering why his relative had asked this guest to dinner, and what merit she could see in him, thought him the stupidest

young man he had ever come across, and was sorely tempted to tell him so.

They tried the usual topics in vain—the instability of the Government, the good looks of the Princess, the disgraceful uncertainty of the weather. At last, Goldthred, driven to despair, propounded the comprehensive question, “What were they doing to-day in the City?” and the companions got on better after so suggestive an inquiry.

Uncle Joseph delivered his opinions solemnly on certain doubtful securities; the younger man made a shrewd observation concerning his own investments. Obviously they had in one respect a similarity of tastes, and each found his dislike of the other decreasing every moment. Uncle Joseph even began to debate in his own mind, whether he ought not to ask his new acquaintance to dinner. He had drunk five glasses of sherry, and I think one more would have settled the point; but the welcome moment of release chimed out with the half-hour from a clock on the chimney-piece, so flinging down his napkin

he pointed to the empty claret-jug, and suggested they should proceed up-stairs.

There was nothing Goldthred desired so much. He pulled his tie straight,—it had a tendency to get under his left ear,—bounced into the passage, whisked his hat off the hall table, weathered the butler coming out with tea, and was already engaged with the enemy, before Uncle Joseph had fairly extricated himself from the dining-room.


The ladies were wrapped in silence; they generally are when the men come up after dinner. They had disposed themselves, also, very judiciously. Mrs. Lascelles sat at the open window, not quite in the room, not quite on the balcony. Jin, with considerable forethought, had entrenched herself in a corner near the pianoforte, free from draughts. The soft mellow lamp-light threw a very becoming lustre on these bewitching individuals. Each knew she was looking well, and it made her look better still. After a bottle of sound claret, it was not to be expected that a man should enact

“his grandsire cut in alabaster” in such company. Goldthred, armed with a flat hat and a coffee-cup, advanced in tolerably good order to the attack.

It was a fine night even in London. The moon sailed broad and bright in a clear, fathomless sky. The very gas-lamps, studding street and square, through the flickering leaves of spring flashed out a diabolical enchantment of their own, half revelry, half romance. The scent of geraniums and mignonette stole with a soft, intoxicating fragrance on the rebellious senses; and a German band, round the corner, was playing a seductive measure of love and languor and lawlessness from the last new opera. Mrs. Lascelles, moving out on the balcony, drank in the soft night-air with a deep-drawn breath that was almost a sigh. Young Goldthred followed as the medium follows the mesmerist, the bird the rattle-snake. His heart beat fast, and the coffee-cup clattered in his hand. Time and scene were adapted, no doubt, for sentiment, especially out of doors.

It is done every day, and all day long. Also, perhaps, more effectually still on nights like these. Pull a man's purse, madam, from his waistcoat-pocket, and although you have Iago's authority for considering it "trash," you may find yourself picking oakum as a first consequence, and may finish, in due course, at the penitentiary; but dive those pretty fingers a thought deeper, take his heart scientifically out of his pericardium, or wherever he keeps it, squeeze it, drain it, rinse it quite dry, return him the shrivelled fragments with a curtsy, and a "thank you kindly, sir," you will receive applause from the bystanders, and hearty approbation from the world in general for your skill.

So Mrs. Lascelles, stifling all compunction, played out the pretty game. They leaned over the balcony, side by side; they smelt the mignonette, with their heads very close together; they looked at the moon, and into each other's eyes, and down on the street, where a faded figure, in torn shawl and tawdry bonnet, flitted past, to be lost in the shadow of darkness farther



on; sighing, smiling, whispering, till the boy's blood surged madly to his brain; and the woman, despite of craft, science, and experience, felt that she must practise all her self-command not to be softer and kinder, if only for a moment, than she desired.

Her white, cool hand lay on the edge of the mignonette box. He covered it with his own. In another moment he would have seized and pressed it, hungrily, rapturously, to his lips. She rose just in time, and came full into the lamp-light from within.

“What nonsense we have been talking!” she exclaimed, with a laugh; “and what a deal of sentiment! It is nice to talk nonsense sometimes, and sentiment too, but a little goes a long way.”

He was hurt, and, not being a woman, showed it.

“I am sorry,” said he gloomily; “I thought you liked it.”

She did not want to snub him too much.

“So I do,” she answered, stepping back into

the drawing-room, "when it's the real thing, sweet and strong, little and good. Come and listen to Jin's song; it's better for you than flirting in the dark on the balcony."

Though mocking and mischievous, there was yet something kind and playful in her tone; he felt quite happy again as he followed her in, meekly, like a lamb to the slaughter.

Miss Ross, although she had taken up a position more adapted to the comfort of an elderly and rheumatic admirer, did not suffer the shining hour to pass away unimproved. She possessed a full, sweet voice, of rare compass, and was a thorough mistress of the musical art, accompanying her own or other people's songs with equal taste and skill. Uncle Joseph, in an arm-chair, with a hand on each knee, sat spell-bound by the Syren,—eyes, ears, and mouth wide open, under the influence of her strains.

It was but a simple ditty of which she gave him the benefit, yet neither nature nor art were spared to render it as destructive as she could. He had never heard it before; but, as he ex-

pressed entire approval of its rhythm, and asked for it again, I feel justified in giving it here. She called it—

“OVER THE WATER.”

I stand on the brink of the river,
 The river that runs to the sea ;
 The fears of a maid I forgive her,
 And bid her come over to me.
 She knows that her lover is waiting,
 She's longing his darling to be,
 And spring is the season of mating,
 But—she dares not come over to thee !

I have jewels and gold without measure,
 I have mountain and meadow and sea ;
 I have store of possessions and treasure,
 All wasting and spoiling for thee.
 Her heart is well worthy the winning,
 But Love is a gift of the free,
 And she vowed from the very beginning,
 She'd never come over to thee.

Then lonely I'll wed with my sorrow—
 Dead branch on a desolate tree—
 My night hath no hope of a morrow,
 Unless she come over to me.
 Love takes no denial, and pity
 Is love in the second degree,
 So, long ere I'd ended my ditty,
 The maiden came over to me !

The two guests left No. 40 together, and

parted at the end of the street; the junior betaking himself to his cigar, the senior to his whist. Each carried away with him a vague idea that he had spent an evening in Paradise. Which of the two had been made the greater fool of, it is not my province to decide; but I have some recollection of an old couplet in the West of England to the following effect:—

“Young man’s love soon blazeth and is done,
Old man’s love burneth to the bone.”

CHAPTER VI.

“TERRARUM DOMINOS.”

“NEAR side, man! the near side! Take it up two holes—that’ll do. Sit tight behind!”

The leaders cringed and winced against their bars. One wheeler, accepting under protest a wipe with the double thong across his quarters, threw himself wildly off the pole; the other, butting like a goat, bounced into his collar; and so, starting the whole coach, the painted, varnished, glittering toy passed on, in clouds of dust, through all that wealth of oak and fern, and hill and dale, and gleaming glade and darkling dell, that make a midsummer fairy-land of Windsor Forest on your way to Ascot Races.

The man who had thus pulled up his team for alteration of their harness was a well-dressed,

clean-made, good-looking young fellow enough. From the crown of his white hat to the soles of his varnished boots he was a "gentleman" all over; and if the choice little posy in his button-hole betrayed a suspicion of dandyism, it was redeemed by the frankness of manner, the good-humoured and unaffected *bonhomie* cultivated by our young warriors of the Household Brigade, horse and foot.

Frank Vanguard, who belonged to the former of these services, was now steering the regimental drag and a roof-ful of brother officers to the great Olympic gathering of modern times on the Cup Day at Ascot.

Good spirits, good humour, banter, repartee, and nonsense, reigned supreme, constituting a combination called "chaff;" just as light wine, effervescence, and fragrant herbs, in due proportions, become "cup." The driver had enough to do, with a free but not very handy team and a crowded road, to the whole of which every carriage he passed assumed a prescriptive right; yet could he find leisure to answer in correspond-

ing vein a volley of jesting remarks shot freely at him from behind.

“Frank,” says a fresh-coloured young warrior, well qualified to enact the part of Achilles, so long as that hero was yet in girl’s clothes, “there’s a nice bit of galloping ground over the rise. You’re not driving a hearse! *Do* spring ’em a bit, and give ’em the silk!”

“I’m not so fond of the silk as *you* are!” answered Frank, touching his near leader lightly under the bars, as a fly-fisher throws his line. “You used to get double-thonged pretty handsomely at Eton, I remember, but it hasn’t done you much good.”

“Rating and flogging,” answered the other, puffing out volumes of smoke; “that’s the way to spoil your young entry!”

“Waste of whipcord,” says a graver youth, desirous, of all things in life, that he should become a Master of Hounds. “They never made you steady from hare!”

“You got that, Charlie!” laughed another; but Charlie, ere this, has found a new interest

in spasms of anxiety lest they should be passed by a rival drag, coming up in clouds of dust on their quarter, like an enemy's frigate through the smoke of battle.

"Who's this cove?" he exclaimed eagerly. "Sits well on his box—nice short-legged team—keeps his whip quiet, and drives to an inch."

"Snob!" replies a sententious captain, with long moustaches, "by name, Picard. Wouldn't have him in the Club. Did something abroad. Quite right. Heavy load and a roughish lot. Team, I should say, better bred than the company. Don't let him get by. D—n it all, Frank! that's a close shave!"

It *was* a close shave! Nothing but the affability with which the near wheeler, having recovered its temper, answered both rein and thong, kept the coach out of a roadside ditch, which would have sent one of the most promising coveys of Her Majesty's peculiar defenders into the thick of Her Majesty's preserves.

In keeping ahead of his rival, Frank Vanguard passed a barouche, from the inside of which was

turned up to him a fair statue-like face, with dark eyes and hair, that flushed faintly under its white lace veil, as it gave him a little modest nod of recognition. No wonder he looked back ; no wonder, thus looking, he brought his wheel so near the edge of a chasm, that one turn more would have turned him over, and that Miss Hallaton, holding her breath, shut both hands tight, while her father exclaimed—

“Nearest thing I ever saw in my life ! Who’s driving, Helen ? He bowed to *you*.”

And Helen, answering demurely,—“Captain Vanguard, I *think*, papa,”—reflected how, had he been upset and hurt, the whole brightness of *her* day would have darkened into sorrow, and how she wished he wouldn’t be quite so reckless, though she liked him for being so bold.

Behind their barouche came a tax-cart, and behind the tax-cart another open carriage, in which drove the party who had assembled at dinner in No. 40, not very long ago.

Uncle Joseph, with his back to the horses, sat in unusual pomp and magnificence, pointing out

the humours, explaining the races, and generally laying down the law, as though he combined in his own person the Mastership of the Buckhounds with the authority of the whole Jockey Club. Owner of a pretty little villa on the Thames, he had invited his kinswoman, the lady of his affections, and Mr. Goldthred to stay with him for Ascot Races. Therefore "The Lilies" smiled gay in chintz and muslin and fresh-cut flowers. Therefore Uncle Joseph, basking in a June sun and the light of Miss Ross's eyes, felt ten, twenty years younger—hopeful, enterprising, volatile as a boy!

Mrs. Lascelles was at all times a person of equable spirits. Perhaps it would be more correct to say, that she possessed that self-command which forbids emotion to appear on the surface. She looked bright, smiling, gracious as usual; her lustrous eyes, rosy lips, and white teeth, enhanced by bonnet, dress, pink-tinted parasol, general sense of triumph, and flush of the summer's day. Poor Goldthred, sitting over against her, strove to stifle certain misgivings

that such a goddess was too noble a prize for creatures of common mould, and vaguely wished he had kept away from the flame, round which, like some singed moth, he could not help fluttering in senseless, suicidal infatuation!

Parties of pleasure cannot always be equally pleasant to everybody concerned. Miss Ross, too, seemed out of spirits and pre-occupied; less gracious to Goldthred, less confiding with Mrs. Lascelles, less susceptible to the attentions of Uncle Joseph himself. Jin, as she was now called in her own set, sank back among the cushions, buried in strange, sad memories, that made her unconscious of the noise, the dust, the glare, the confusion of tongues, the crush of carriages, all the charms of the expedition. This, because playing at a cottage door, shouting vigorously as they passed, she had caught a glimpse of a ruddy, dark-eyed urchin, who reminded her painfully of her child. It was but one glance, as he sat triumphant in the dust, waving two dirty little hands round a black curly head, yet it was enough. She was

back in sunny France once more, with something to trust in, something to work for, something to love. Looking in Uncle Joseph's battered old face and cloudy eyes, rather near her own, she could scarce repress a movement of abhorrence and disgust; while he, good man, under the impression that he was more delightful than usual, inveighed against the furious driving, the extravagant habits, and general recklessness of the Household Cavalry.

“He's *very* good-looking!” observed Jin, rousing herself to make a remark that she knew would be unpalatable to her listener; “isn't he, Rose?”

“*Very!*” assented Mrs. Lascelles; “but you should see him in regimentals, my dear. I think I'll ask him to dinner.”

Symptoms of mental disquietude in Uncle Joseph and young Goldthred. Each marvelling that a transitory glimpse, while passing at a hand-gallop, should have made so vivid an impression; and the latter wondering whether, if he were to alter the whole tenor of his life, to arm

his chest with a cuirass, and plunge his legs into jack-boots, Mrs. Lascelles would deem him also worth looking at in “regimentals,” as an officer’s uniform is called by nobody but ladies who have never been in a regiment.

No amusement, except perhaps cricket, seems so popular as racing, yet out of every hundred people who attend Epsom, Ascot, or Doncaster, do you suppose five know one favourite from another, or, indeed, ever look at the noble animal, except he shows temper in his canter before the start? Helen Hallaton, though she dearly loved a horse, could not even have told you how many were going for the race about to commence as she took up her station on the Course; and yet the pretty pageant, bright and blooming like a June flower-bed, passed under her very nose. But she could have given a clear account of the masterly manner in which Frank Vanguard brought his coach into the enclosure; how he laid it alongside Viscount Jericho’s, with as much pomp and little less manœuvring than moors an iron-clad at regulation distance from

her consort; with what easy magnificence he flung his reins to right and left, condescendingly facetious the while with sundry muscular cads, who put their shoulders to the wheels and deftly extracted the pole. She could have told you how he leaped like a Mercury from his box, how carefully he laid aside his whip in its case, how with a silk handkerchief he dusted his white hat, his shirt-front, his curling moustaches, and the places where his whiskers were coming fast; lastly, how he took from the inside of the coach a beautiful little nosegay, daintily tied up, and stuck it into his button-hole, causing her to admit in her own mind that she wouldn't mind wearing one of those flowers herself, if she could have it without its being given her.

Of all this, I say, Miss Hallaton made accurate note; but I doubt if she had an idea of Mr. Picard's team, though it came next; of his flash-looking load, with a *loudish* lady on the box; of his blue coach, his red wheels, his well-dressed servants, or the workmanlike pull-up which brought the whole thing to an anchor, and was,

indeed, one of the best performances of the day.

And now a dozen two-year-olds, after a dozen false starts, have run off their five furlongs with the speed of an express train, and “the Termagant filly,” overpowering her jockey, a little bundle of pink satin and buff, huddled up on her back, has won by a neck. There is a lull till the numbers are up for the next race, and even the Ring, hungry, insatiate, roaring like the ocean, has subsided into a momentary calm. Sir Henry takes a cigar from a gorgeous case, and turns to his daughter.

“Backed her for her blood, Nell,” says he; “they’re all speedy, but they can’t stay. Only a pony—that’s better than nothing, however.”

“How *can* you, papa?” replies Nell. “It’s wicked of you to bet, though you *do* generally seem to win.”

Helen draws the usual distinction as to the immorality of gambling. To win is less than folly, to lose is more than sin. I do not think though that Sir Henry was equally confiding

about his wagers when his judgment had been at fault. He seemed in the best of humours now.

“Nell, that’s the prettiest bonnet we’ve hoisted the whole season, and the dress isn’t the worst I’ve seen to-day. It’s cruel to waste such a ‘get-up’ in a carriage. Come across, and we’ll show ourselves on the Lawn.”

“And you won’t bet on the next race, papa?” says Helen, delighted; for is there not a chance, nay, almost a certainty, that Captain Vanguard, having eaten, and drunk, and smoked, and been through all the other privileged portals, will come to the lawn for inspection of countless ladies drawn up in line-of-battle on their own special parade-ground?

The great tumult of the day was over; the Royal party had arrived under the usual burst of cheers; the greys had been admired; the carriages commented on; the Master of the Buckhounds, his horse, his figure, his boots, his seat, and all that covered it, subjected to rigid criticism. Everybody had a few spare minutes to walk about and admire or ridicule everybody

else. As father and daughter set foot on the smooth burnt-up slope in front of the boxes, they came suddenly face to face with Mrs. Lascelles and Miss Ross. Each lady caught sight of Sir Henry at the same moment, and waited to see what her friend would do. I believe that if one had turned coldly on her heel, in answer to his ready salute, the other would have followed suit, and neither would ever have spoken to her fickle admirer again. But it is probable that the latter's habits familiarized him with such meetings, for in an instant he had both by the hand, and was accosting them with that mixture of interest, deference, and cordiality, which constituted the charm of his very agreeable manner. He seemed to take it as a matter of course that he should have made love to both, that they should all meet at Ascot, and that he should proceed to make love to them again.

"So glad to see you, Mrs. Lascelles!" exclaimed this hardened offender. "How wet you must have got the last time we parted. I sent my carriage after you directly I got home, but it

was too late. So glad to see you, Miss Ross. You left us in such a hurry we didn't half wish you good-bye. Helen and I were very dull without you. Here she is—don't she look well? don't you both look well? don't we all look well?"

With such effrontery it was impossible not to fall into an easy strain of conversation, and after an affectionate greeting had been exchanged between Helen and her two presumptive step-mothers, the whole party proceeded to Mrs. Lascelles's box, from whence, without crowding or inconvenience, they could see the race for the Cup, in so far as it was affected by the run-in seventy yards from home.

Sir Henry, who had another "pony" depending on this event, would have liked to be a little nearer the Judge's chair; but I doubt if the ladies cared much for the final struggle, decided by half a length. Mrs. Lascelles, thinking that her old admirer looked worn, handsome, and gentlemanlike, in spite of crow's-feet and grizzling whiskers, while resolving to punish

him severely for his treachery, was reflecting that the process would be by no means unpleasant to herself. Miss Ross continued silent and preoccupied, haunted by the vision of that sturdy boy kicking and crowing in the dirt. While Helen, commanding the four-in-hand coaches with her glass, saw only Vanguard's shapely figure on the roof of his drag as he turned to watch the race; and when the excitement was over, sprang down to mingle with the crowd that poured into the Course, on his way, as she hoped and believed, to join them here.

Now he stops to speak to a good-looking bad-looking man, whom she recognises as the driver of the coach which so nearly overtook his own. Certain courtesies of the road have already made these two acquaintances and almost friends. Now he bows to a duchess, now nods to a gipsy; presently he is lost in the throng, and emerges under their very box, when good-humoured Mrs. Lascelles, doing as she would be done by, beckons him up at once, and makes ready a place for him at Miss Hallaton's side.

He has something pleasant to say to each lady; and Miss Ross rouses herself to observe his good looks, enhanced by that frank air of courtesy, peculiar to an English gentleman, which is so fascinating to the women least accustomed to it. She gives him the benefit of a deadly shot or two from her black eyes, as he seats himself by Helen's side, and the girl, quick-sighted, silent, sensitive, feels each glance like a stab.

But it is pleasant to have him here, out of the crowd, amidst this beautiful scenery, under the summer sun, and over her steals that feeling of security and complete repose which is the infallible test of genuine affection.

He is quiet and happy too. Neither of them says much; perhaps they have a good deal to think of, and are thinking of it.

Uncle Joseph and young Goldthred, returning from an unremunerative expedition to the betting-ring, are somewhat discomfited to observe this invasion of their territories, but become speedily reassured in detecting Sir Henry's obvious

anxiety to escape, that he may get “on” for the next race, and the ill-concealed admiration of Frank Vanguard for that reckless individual’s daughter.

Mr. Groves backs Mrs. Lascelles’s invitation freely.

“You will come and dine, Sir Henry,” says she; “promise, and I’ll let you off this minute. You know you are dying to get back to that wicked betting. Think of Helen. She’ll be tired to death with the journey to London in a stuffy railway. Things! You don’t want any things. Besides, why not work the wires? Telegraph for your servants to bring them down. We needn’t dress for dinner. Captain Vanguard, if you can get away from the barracks, won’t you come too?”

Frank looked at Helen, Helen looked resolutely at the card in her hand. He was forced, unwillingly, to decline, but doubtless remarked the colour fade in her cheek while he did so, expressing at the same time a hope of meeting next day. Uncle Joseph, who had quite abandoned the

control of his own household, expressed entire satisfaction with everybody's arrangements, and Miss Ross whispered in his ear, "it was very *dear* of him to be so good-natured!"

Goldthred, too, having lost nine pairs of gloves, six and a half, three buttons, to Mrs. Lascelles, was in the seventh heaven. Altogether, not many race-goers left the Course better pleased with themselves that day. And Mr. Picard, looking down at Helen as he passed her carriage driving home, said to the loudish lady by his side—

"*That's* the handsomest girl I've seen the whole season! I wonder who she is?"

To which the loudish lady replied with acrimony—

"*Do* you think so? Well, perhaps she *is* fresh looking, in a bread-and-butter, missyish sort of style. Can't you go a little faster? One gets choked with this horrid dust!"

CHAPTER VII.

FRANK.

THE barrack-room of a subaltern in the Household Cavalry has been lately described by a gifted authoress as resembling "the boudoir of a young duchess." My experience of the latter, I honestly confess, is exceedingly limited; but I think I know enough of the former tenement to submit that our talented romancer has overstated her case. She would have been nearer the mark, I imagine, had she compared the lair of the formidable warrior to a servants' hall, a laundry, a condemned cell, or some such abode of vacuity and desolation, modified principally by whitewash. Gaudy pictures on the walls, gaudy flowers in the window-sill, do indeed serve to brighten the neutral tints prevailing in an officer's quarters, as provided by his grateful

country, and a barrack-room chair is an exceedingly comfortable resting-place in which to smoke the pipe of peace in the stronghold of war. For ease, merriment, and good-fellowship, give me the habitation of the dragoon; but when you talk of pomp, luxury, taste, and refinement, I am prepared to back the duchess, ay, even though she be a dowager duchess, against all the cavalry regiments in the Army List, and give you the Horse Artillery in!

Let us take, for example, the room in which Frank Vanguard lies fast asleep, at ten in the morning, though a summer sun, streaming through the open window, bathes him, like a male Danaë, in floods of gold. He possesses horses, carriages, costly jewellery, clothes in abundance, boots innumerable, yet his furniture consists of the following items:—

One iron bedstead, without curtains; one wooden tub; one enormous sponge, one medium-sized ditto; a chest of drawers, constructed to travel by baggage-waggon; a huge box, meant to hold saddlery; a stick and whip stand;

twelve pairs of spurs; a set of boxing-gloves; four steeple-chase prints; and a meerschaum pipe he never smokes. These, with a chair or two, and a few toilet necessaries, comprise the whole furniture of his apartment; and he is happier here than in luxurious London lodgings, lordly castle, or stately country house.

The song of birds, the flutter of the summer morning, snort, stamp, and stable-call, ring of bridle, and clink of steel, all fail to wake him. He is not for duty to-day, and never went to bed till five in the morning.

To say nothing of the mess-man and his satellites, it is a heavy week, that of Ascot Races, for field-officers, captains, subalterns, and all concerned in the dispensation of unbounded hospitality at Windsor during the meeting. They entertain countless guests, they convey them to and from the Course, they provide board and lodging for the gentlemen, amusement and adoration for the ladies, they are afoot day and night; yet seem always fresh, lively, good-humoured, and on the alert. But even cavalry

officers are mortal, and though they never confess it, they *must* be very tired, and a little thankful when the whole function is over.

No wonder Frank sleeps so sound—dreaming doubtless of—what? His dark-brown charger, his chestnut mare, the stag he shot last year in Scotland, the team he drove yesterday to Ascot? Of Miss Hallaton, perhaps, and the deep lustrous eyes that haunted him so while he flung himself on his bed and went off into the very slumber from which he is roused, even now, by unceremonious knuckles tapping at the door.

A sleepy man says “come in” without waking, and enter a soldier-servant nearly seven feet high, who proceeds to fill the tub, and further dressing arrangements generally, with a clatter, that he has found from experience of many masters is the surest way to get a sluggard out of bed. This stalwart personage considers himself responsible (and it is no light burthen) that his officer should always be in time. With a Cornet his prevision is touching, and almost maternal in its care. Having thoroughly roused

the sleeper, his servant plants himself at the bedside, drawn up to an exceeding altitude, in the position drill-sergeants call "attention."

"What is it?" says Frank yawning.

"Gentleman come to breakfast, sir. Waiting in the little mess-room."

"Order it at once, Blake, and say I'll be down in twenty minutes."

Exit Blake, facing to the right, solemnly but far less noisily than he came in; while Frank with one bound is on the floor, and with another in his tub, not feeling his eyes quite open till he has splashed the bracing cold water into them more than once.

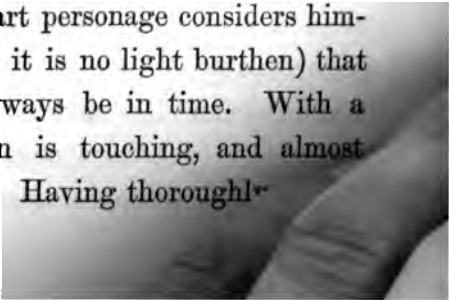
While he shaves and dresses, getting through each process with surprising celerity, I may state that the gentleman waiting breakfast for him below is none other than Mr. Picard, the driver of the blue-coach with red wheels, the quick-stepping browns, and the loudish lady of the day before.

A timely pull in Frank's favour, when the latter was in difficulties with his team at an

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While he shaves and dresses, getting through each process with surprising celerity. I may state that the gentleman waiting breakfast for him is none other than Mr. Picard, the driver of the blue-coach with red wheels, and the loudest of blabbers, and the loudest of blabbers in Frank's favour, who comes with his

awkward corner on the Heath,—a little judicious flattery extolling the capabilities of that team, and the mode in which it was handled,—a draught of champagne-cup offered,—a cigar exchanged,—and Vanguard was so pleased with his new friend, that he pressed the invitation which now brought him to breakfast in the officers' mess-room, accompanied by an appetite that never failed, and a determination to make the most of this, as of all other advantages in the game of life.

A couple of Cornets are already hard at work, with the voracity of youth just done growing in length but not breadth. Their jaws cease simultaneously at the entrance of a stranger, and, boys as they are, the instinct of each warns him against this plausible personage whom, as a guest, they welcome nevertheless with hospitality and perfect good breeding. It speaks well for Picard's *savoir faire*, that long ere his entertainer comes down, he has made a favourable impression on these late Etonians, so that, emerging to smoke outside in couples as usual, says one inseparable to the other—

“Pleasant company that hairy chap, and tongue enough for a street-preacher! Who the devil is he, Jack, and where did Frank pick him up?”

To which Jack, whose real name is Frederic, replies with deliberation—

“Not *quite* the clean potato, young man, you may take my word for it. But that makes no odds. We’ll have him to dinner. Shouldn’t wonder if the party could sing a good song and do conjuring tricks.”

“Pea-and-thimble and the rest of it,” rejoins his friend. “Come and look at my bay mare.”

So, dismissing Picard from their thoughts, they leave him to Frank Vanguard and breakfast.

These appear simultaneously. Frank, looking exceedingly clean, fresh, and handsome, is full of apologies for keeping his guest waiting.

“But you see we were very late last night,” he urges, “and I’m not one of those fellows who can do entirely without sleep. If I don’t get four or five hours I’m fit for nothing. It’s constitutional, no doubt. I think I must have been *born* tired.”

Picard laughs—and when he laughs his expression changes for the worse. “I can sit up for ever,” says he, “if there’s anything to sit up for. A roll in the blankets and a tub are as good as a night’s rest to me. Now, you’ll hardly believe I was playing *ecarté* till six this morning, and came down by the nine o’clock train!”

Frank *didn't* believe it, though it was true enough, but helped himself to a cutlet without expressing incredulity.

“Did you drive all the way back yesterday?” said he. “You must have been late in London, and it’s a good day’s work.”

“I had three teams on the road,” answered the other, “and only one of them took any getting together. Faith, the heaviest part of the business was talking to Mrs. Battersea! She *would* come, and she *would* sit on the box, and she sulked all the way home. You’ll never guess why.”

Mrs. Battersea was a celebrity of a certain standing in certain circles, not quite without the pale of decent society, yet as near the edge as was possible, short of actual expulsion. If a

male Battersea existed he never appeared, and the lady who bore his name, a showy middle-aged woman, with a fine figure, and all the airs of a beauty, seemed in no wise restricted by matrimonial thralldom. She was one of those people to be seen at reviews, races, and all open-air gatherings within twenty miles of London—at flower-shows, plays, operas, and charity concerts in the metropolis; but nobody ever met her at a dinner-party, a ball, or a “drum.” To sum up—men like Picard called her “a stunner;” ladies like Mrs. Lascelles said she was “bad style.”

Frank, thinking none the better of this new friend for the freedom with which he talked of his female acquaintance, professed ignorance of Mrs. Battersea’s reasons for discontent.

“Not easily pleased, I dare say,” he answered carelessly. “Sometimes they’re not, when they have every thing their own way. Nervous on a coach, perhaps? And yet that could hardly be, for you’ve got the handiest team out, and I can see you’re as good as most professionals.”

“Guess again,” said the other, who had finished breakfast, and was lighting a cigar.

Frank pondered.

“Seen a better-looking woman than herself, then; that’ll do it sometimes, I’ve remarked. And they’re bad to hold when they think there’s something else in the race. If it wasn’t that, I give it up.”

“You’re right, Vanguard,” exclaimed his guest. “You’ve hit it, sir, plumb-centre, as we used to say on the Potomac. Mrs. Battersea never ceased talking all the way down; and some queer things she told us, too! The rough side of her tongue rasps like a file! Well, she was in high feather the whole day. Liked her luncheon, liked her bonnet, liked herself, liked her company, so she said; but, coming off the Course, we passed a *duck* of a girl in an open carriage: a girl with wonderful eyes and a pale face, but features like Melpomene. She’d got on a light-coloured dress, with a lilac sort of bonnet—I daresay you didn’t notice her.”

Frank's heart leaped to his throat, meeting his final gulp of coffee. *Didn't notice her*, forsooth! while the wonderful eyes, pale face, Melpomene mouth, light dress, even the lilac bonnet, had been haunting him for the last twelve hours.

"I only said, 'What a pretty girl!' as we went by," continued Picard, "and, will you believe it, Mrs. Battersea got her frill out on the instant! She never gave us another civil word the whole way to London: not one to share amongst the whole coach-load. Those two little Carmine girls that I brought down for Macdonald and Algy Brown were so frightened they wanted to stop at Hounslow and go home by the omnibus! That was after she caught Rosie making faces behind her back. Algy tried to take his poor little 'pal's' part, and didn't she chaw *him* up, too! Rather! I'd nothing to do but mind my driving and think of the Helen who had done all this mischief."

"How did you know her name was Helen?" asked Frank, completely off his guard.

“Well, I *didn't*,” said the other, wondering at his host's excitement; “but I suppose now that it *is*, and that you know her. Couldn't you introduce *me*?”

“Certainly, if you wish it,” was the reply, “though probably we don't mean the same lady. There *is* a Miss Hallaton that answers to your description, and she *was* at the races yesterday. Daughter of Sir Henry Hallaton, rather a good-looking, oldish man, in a white hat and red neckcloth.”

“That's it!” exclaimed Picard; “I spotted the father, red neckcloth and all! Depend upon it you're right, and it must have been Miss—— What's her name? Hallaton? Well, all I can say is, I've not seen a better-looking one since I left Charleston, and very few who could beat her there. Do they go much to London? Do they live anywhere near here? I think the governor's a loosish fish. I saw him drinking 'cup' with some queer-looking people behind my coach, and he was in and out of the Ring all day. Beg pardon, Vanguard, if they're friends

of yours. I didn't mean to say anything disagreeable, I give you my word."

"Oh! I don't know them very well," said Frank, growing red, and feeling that he was making himself ridiculous. "I stayed with them last winter, near Bragford. Capital place to hunt from, and Sir Henry was very kind and hospitable. If you're quite done, shall we come outside? The drag will start in an hour, and I will have a place kept for you, if you'd like to go with the others from here."

"I am not going at all," answered Picard. "The fact is, I'm not much of a racing man, and two days running is rather a benefit. Don't let me put you out in your arrangements, I beg. This is a beautiful neighbourhood, and I've been so much abroad, that I quite enjoy the air, and the English scenery, and the rest of it. I'd rather take a quiet walk while you're all at the races; but I'll stay and see you start the team notwithstanding."

"Not going!" thought Frank. "How very odd! Now, what can a fellow like this have to

do down here on the sly? Country walk! Gammon! He's after some robbery, I'll lay a hundred!" but he only *said*—

"My Cornet's going to drive. I don't think I shall be on the Heath at all, unless I gallop a hack over in the afternoon."

"Hot work," answered Picard carelessly. "I thought everybody was keen about racing, except me." But he too wondered at the taste of his entertainer in thus preferring a solitary morning to a pleasant drive in the merriest of company, accounting for it on a theory of his own.

"War-path, of course! and, keen as a true Indian, means to follow it up alone. Got 'sign,' no doubt, and sticks to the trail like a wolf. Won't come back, I'll lay a thousand, without 'raising hair.' Ah! this child, too, could take scalps once, and hang them round his belt, with the best of ye! And *now*——Well, I'm about no harm to-day, at any rate, and that's refreshing, if it's only for a change!"

So he sat himself down on a garden seat in

front of the officers' quarters, where, producing a case the size of a portmanteau, filled with such cigars as are only consumed by trans-Atlantic smokers, and, offering them liberally all round, he soon became the centre of an admiring circle, civil as well as military, to whom he related sundry experiences of international warfare in the States, well told, interesting, no doubt, and more startling than probable.

Mr. Picard had certain elements of popularity, such as launch a man in general society fairly enough, but fail to afford him secure anchorage in that restless element. He was good-looking, well-dressed, plausible, always ready to eat, drink, smoke, dance, play, or, indeed, partake in the amusement of the hour. He looked like a gentleman, but nobody knew who he was. He seemed to have a sufficiency of money, but nobody knew where he got it. The *Court Guide* vouched for him as J. Picard, Esq., under the letter "P," with two addresses, a first-rate hotel and a third-rate club. The *Morning Post* even took charge of him in its fashionable arrivals and departures.

Men began to know him after "the Epsom Spring," and by Hampton races he had ceased to arouse interest, scarcely even excited curiosity, but had failed to make a single female acquaintance above the class of Mrs. Battersea; nor had he, indeed, gained one step of the social ladder people take such pains to climb, in order to obtain, after all, but a wider view from Dan to Beersheba.

Such men crop up like mushrooms at the beginning of every London season, and fade like annuals with the recess. Goodwood sees the last expiring blaze of their splendour, and next year, if you ask for them, they are extinct; but, as the Highland soldier says, "There are plenty more where they come from." In dress, style, manner, they vary but little. All dine constantly at Richmond, shoot well, and drive a team, in the handling of which they improve vastly as the season wears on.

Mr. Picard could, however, lay claim to a little more interest than the rest, in his character of a soldier-adventurer, to which he was entitled

by service with the Confederates during their prolonged struggle against overwhelming odds. Somehow, every soldier-adventurer concerned in that war seems to have been a Southerner. Certainly the romance was all on their side, though the scale, weighed down by "great battalions," turned in favour of the North. From his own account, Picard had done his "little best," as he called it, for the party he espoused; and observing a gash on his cheek, which could only be a sabre-cut, it was hard to listen coldly while he talked of Stonewall Jackson and Brigadier Stuart as ordinary men do of Bright and Gladstone—perhaps with no more familiar knowledge of the heroes than a general public has of these statesmen. Still, the subject was captivating and well treated, the contrast between Stuart's dashing, desperate, rapidly-moving light horsemen and Her Majesty's Cuirassiers of the Guard was exciting, the similarity in many points flattering to both. Cornets listened open-mouthed, and felt the professional instinct rising strong in their martial young souls; older officers smiled approbation,

not disdaining to gather hints from one who had seen *real* warfare, as to nosebags, havresacks, picket-ropes, and such trifling minutiae as affect the efficiency of armies and turn the tide of campaigns. When the drag appeared nobody discovered that Frank Vanguard had made a masterly retreat; and Picard had received as many invitations to remain and be "put-up" in barracks as would have lasted him till the regiment changed quarters, and his entertainers had found out half he said was an *old* story and the other half not true.

CHAPTER VIII.

JUNE ROSES.

UNCLE JOSEPH was a good judge of many things besides bonds, debentures, shares, and scrip. When he bought "The Lilies" we may be sure he had his wits about him, and made no imprudent investment. A prettier villa never was reflected in the Thames. Huge elms, spreading cedars, delicate acacias quivering in the lightest air, the very point-lace of the forest, were grouped by Nature's master-hand round a wide-porch'd, creeper-clad building, with long low rooms, and windows opening on a lawn, all aglow with roses budding, blushing, blooming, to the water's edge. It was a little Paradise of leaf and flower and stream, such as is only to be found on the banks of our London river; such

as calls up at sight images of peace and love and hope, and sweet untried romance for the young and trustful; such as wafts a thrill, not altogether painful, to the hearts of weary, way-worn travellers, for whom, in all that golden belief of the Past, there is nothing real now but a memory and a sigh. Such a lawn, such a scene, such flowers, were thoroughly in keeping with such a woman as Mrs. Lascelles, moving gracefully among the roses under a summer sky.

So thought poor Goldthred, emerging from the French windows of the breakfast-room for a *tête-à-tête* with his goddess, that might last half-an-hour, that might be cut short (he knew her caprices) in less than five minutes! A *tête-à-tête* from which he hoped to advance positively and tangibly in her favour, but which, like many others of the same kind, he feared might terminate in disappointment, discomfiture, despair.

Breakfast, with this unfortunate young man, had been a repast of paroxysms, alternating between rapture and dismay, such as completely destroyed anything like appetite or digestion.

It was all very well for Uncle Joseph to go twice at the ham on the side-table, and devour such a lump of *pâté de foie gras* as would have choked a coal-heaver. It was all very well for Sir Henry, lounging down when everybody else had nearly done, avowedly with no appetite, after a cup of exceedingly hot coffee, to play as good a knife and fork as an Eton boy. It was all very well for the ladies, Mrs. Lascelles especially, to peck here and peck there—a slice of chicken, a strawberry, a bit of toast, an egg, a morsel of muffin, the least possible atom of pie—till each had made a pretty substantial meal. But could their heartless voracity stifle *his* (Goldthred's) sensibilities, or prevent his food tasting like leather, his tea like camomiles? Breakfast was over ere he recovered his proper senses, and then it was too late! The tonic so long denied this patient sufferer consisted of a few words from Mrs. Lascelles, not addressed, indeed, to himself, but accompanied by a glance he interpreted correctly, and accepted with delight.

“Uncle Joseph,” said she, “your roses are shamefully neglected, and I shall inspect them thoroughly when I’ve drunk my tea.”

Uncle Joseph, who, for sanitary reasons, never stirred till half an hour had elapsed after eating, grunted acquiescence; but Goldthred, unmindful of the *convenances*, rapturously followed his tyrant into the garden, the instant her muslin skirt disappeared over the window-sill.

She waited till they were out of sight from the house, then gathered a rose, fragrant, blooming, lovable as herself, and gave it him with a winning smile.

“I’ve got something to say to you, Mr. Goldthred—something I don’t want everybody else to hear.”

But for the flower pressed close against his lips, he felt that his heart must have leaped out of his mouth, and fallen at her feet. Never a word he spoke, but the light in his eyes, the glow on his face were answer enough.

“You won’t be offended?” she continued, gathering rose after rose, and tying them up in

a cluster, as she walked on. "You won't be cross, unreasonable, unkind? Indeed, it's for your own sake quite as much as mine. Mr. Goldthred, you can do me a great favour. Promise now; will you do it?"

He made no bargain; he showed no hesitation, but his very ears were crimson with sincerity while he answered—

"Do it, Mrs. Lascelles! What is there I wouldn't do for you? I wish you—you'd ask me to do something dangerous, or difficult, or— or impossible even! You'd see there's something in me, then, and perhaps you'd think better of me than you do now."

"Think better!" she repeated gaily. "Upon my word, I wonder what you'd have! But I don't want you to do anything impossible, no, nor even disagreeable. On the contrary, I should say it would be very pleasant. I want you to—to flirt a little with Miss Hallaton—there!"

"Mrs. Lascelles!" was all he said, but something in his tone caused her to laugh

rather nervously, and quicken her pace as she continued—

“ Oh! it’s nothing to make a fuss about, and you needn’t look so reproachful! Miss Hallaton is a very nice girl, and very pretty. I’m sure everybody thinks so, though she hasn’t quite colour enough for my taste. You know you admire her, Mr. Goldthred, and why should you mind telling her so?”

“ But I *don’t!*” persisted Goldthred, in a great heat and fuss. “ Can’t you see, Mrs. Lascelles? Is it not plain?”

She made no scruple of interrupting him.

“ Then you *must!*” she insisted, tying a white rose deftly in amongst its blushing sisters. “ You needn’t be *too* much in earnest, you know, but I wish you to pay a little attention to Miss Hallaton, for reasons of my own. If you’re very good I’ll tell you what they are.”

Oh! cool and crafty spider! Oh! silly struggling fly! Blue-eyed spider in muslin and ribbons, fresh, smiling, radiant as morning. Helpless fly in tweed and broad-cloth, won-

dering, blundering, blind as midnight. The fly buzzed a faint affirmative, and the spider went on.

“The fact is, Mr. Goldthred, you see you’re a good deal with us, and I’m sure we’re always delighted to have you. Both Jin and I like you very much. Jin says you are the only pleasant *young* man she knows. But the world *will* talk, and—and—people are beginning to make remarks. I’m almost old enough to be your mother. Well; you needn’t contradict one so flat. You know what I mean, you men are so much younger of your age than us poor women. But that makes no difference. One can’t be too careful. Now if you were seen making up a little to Helen,—and she *is* a very charming girl, I assure you,—it would stop all their mouths. They say very disagreeable things as it is, and one must do *something*. I shouldn’t like to think you were never to come and see me any more.”

Was not this a golden opportunity? Did she hear the grating of that accursed rake just round the laurel-bush? Could that be why her blue

eyes shone so soft and kind, why the words dropped from her rosy mouth like honey from the comb? The gravel-walk (lately raked, and be hanged to it!) was rough as Brighton shingle; his trowsers were of the thinnest fabric known to Messrs. Miles; yet I confidently believe Goldthred would have popped down on his knees, then and there, to run that one great chance he dwelt on night and day, but for the additional step that brought them face to face with a gardener working leisurely, in rolled-up shirt-sleeves, and surrounded by the implements of his art. Goldthred swore, I fear, though not aloud. The happy moment had slipped through his fingers like running-water, like the sands of time, like change for a sovereign, like everything else in a world that "keeps moving," whether we will or no. Of all impossibilities, there is none so impossible as to put the clock back.

Beyond this inopportune gardener, they came in sight of certain hay-makers, and turning from these were close to the house once more. No further explanation was practicable, but unless

some tacit agreement had been made to the lady's satisfaction, she would hardly have pushed her roses in the gentleman's face, with a sweet smile and a recommendation to inhale their fragrance while they were fresh.

"You deserve them all, indeed you do!" she said warmly. "And I'll put the best of them on your dressing-table myself. Thank you *really*. You won't forget your promise? I know I can depend upon *you*."

Then she marched into the drawing-room laden with her spoils, well-pleased; while Goldthred, retiring to smoke the morning cigar, felt less satisfied, on reflection, than he had been when the white fingers and red roses were so close to his lips a while ago.

It seems that in all couples, not excepting the matrimonially tethered, a pair must necessarily pull different ways. Goldthred's innocent notion of heaven upon earth was that this despotic lady should become his wife, but she had handled him so skilfully, he dared not ask for fear of being refused. Mrs. Lascelles, who deserved some

credit for crushing down the instinct of appropriation, natural to all women, however little they may prize an admirer, would have been glad, to do her justice, that Helen, for her own sake, should make an advantageous marriage. She reflected, moreover, that her furtherance of such an arrangement would bring her into closer relations with Sir Henry. Then she wondered whether she still liked him, confessing in her secret heart she was almost afraid she *did*.

That careless, easy-going personage had disposed himself, in the meantime, on the most sloping of garden chairs under a tree. Helen had brought him the morning and weekly papers, also one of the evening before. He was cool, comfortable, and thoroughly satisfied with Sir Henry Hallaton. His rings were more abundant, his whiskers more riotous, his handkerchief of brighter hues than ever. Had he not looked so like a gentleman his style of dress would have been gaudy and almost slang; but the combination had done him good service for many years, and he stuck to it still. Smoking a huge cigar,

he watched its wreathes curling and clinging about the dark, crisp foliage of the cedar-branch overhead, while his thoughts wandered dreamily amongst the various interests of his pleasant, lazy, useless, and rather selfish life: his Alderneys at Blackgrove; his bailiff's book; the two-year old they were breaking at home; the brougham Barker was building him in London; Outrigger's chance in the Thames Handicap to-day; Uncle Joseph's dry champagne last night; the dress Mrs. Lascelles wore yesterday at the races; how Miss Ross had pulled in her waist this morning; on divine women in endless perspective, whom he had loved, or *thought* he loved, or made love to, without even that excuse, concluding how very few were equal to Helen. What a dear little thing it was as a child! What a graceful, engaging girl! So frank, so gentle, such a *lady*, and so fond of *him*! Suspecting that, after all, he *really* cared more for his own daughter than he had ever cared for the daughter, or wife, or mother of anybody else.

Arriving at this conclusion, and the end of his cigar, he was aware of a light step on the lawn, a rustle of muslin skirts trailing across the sward, —a familiar sound, to which, I fear, Sir Henry's ear turned, as turns the charger's to the trumpet call, the hunter's to the well-known challenge of a "find." Miss Ross, carrying a plateful of strawberries, bent over him, a world of mirth and mischief gleaming in her bright black eyes.

"You take life very easily, Sir Henry," said she, looking down on his recumbent figure with a sort of sarcastic admiration. "I'm a pretty cool hand myself, so people tell me, but I can't hold a candle to *you*, I must confess."

"Exactly," replied Sir Henry. "Prettier, but not so cool. I quite agree with you. I know what you mean."

"I don't mean it a bit!" exclaimed Miss Ross; "and of all people in the world I don't want *you* to tell me I'm pretty. You know that, or, at least, you ought to know it by this time!"

"Don't you think I'm a good judge?" asked

this incorrigible person, with a smile of entire satisfaction.

She could not help laughing.

“Perhaps *too* good a judge,” she answered; “but a judge that shall never find *me* guilty, I promise you! No; what I envy is your unrivalled *sang-froid*, your entire freedom from anxiety in a position that would make most people feel awkward, if not uncomfortable.”

“Uncomfortable!” he repeated; “why uncomfortable! Ah! perhaps you’re right, and I *do* want another cushion. I’d go and fetch it, Miss Ross, only I’d much rather stay where I am, and talk to you.”

She shot another scornful glance, not that he was the least abashed by it, and went on:—

“You’ve got all sorts of duties, cares, responsibilities, but they don’t seem to affect you in the least—property, debts, of course” (Sir Henry nodded assent), “politics, position, that charming daughter; a bad day yesterday—you see I know all about it—and a certain loss to-day, if you don’t bestir yourself, on the

Thames Handicap. Yet there you sit, as unmoved and almost as highly ornamented as a Hindoo idol. I wish I had your secret."

"Very simple," answered the other. "Irons! Nothing but irons! Plenty of them, and put them all in the fire at once. Dividing your cares is like dividing your affections—one balances another, and you carry them as easy as a milkmaid carries her pails."

"That's all very fine in theory," replied Miss Ross; "but there's such a thing as spilt milk, and a dozen cold irons won't prevent a hot one burning your fingers. There's a hot one to-day in the Thames Handicap. Never mind how I know it, Sir Henry, but I *do* know it. This horse they call Outrigger has no more chance of winning than your hat! Why do you tie that hideous gauze thing round it?"

Sir Henry was equal to the occasion.

"Suits my style of ugliness," he answered; adding, with well-assumed carelessness—"So Outrigger won't win, Miss Ross. Why won't he?"

“Not meant!”

“I never thought he was,” said Sir Henry, who had backed the horse for more money than he liked to think of. “My impression, you see, agrees with your information. I don’t doubt it, of course, particularly as you won’t tell me where you got it.”

“I won’t, indeed,” asseverated Jin, who would have been puzzled to name her authority, inasmuch as the startling intelligence originated in her own fertile brain. For particular reasons this unscrupulous young lady was anxious the whole party from The Lilies should start for the races together, while she alone remained at home. In discussing their plans the evening before, great lukewarmness had been shown on this point; Helen, perhaps for particular reasons, too, professing indifference to the coming day’s sport. Even Sir Henry did not seem to have made up his mind; but Miss Ross argued, correctly enough, that if he went, Mrs. Lascelles would go, and the rest of the party would surely accompany their hostess; then, at the last

moment, she could frame an excuse, and so have the day to herself. Therefore it was she made no scruple in calumniating the merits of Out-rigger and the honesty of his owners.

Sir Henry was now in a desperate fidget to be off. He must get "out," he felt, at any price, and a few minutes might make all the difference. He stretched himself, yawned with an affectation of carelessness that did not in the least deceive his companion, and asked when the carriages were ordered.

"The same time as yesterday," answered Miss Ross, pleased with the result of her stratagem. "You won't say I told you," she added, looking coquettishly down at the recumbent baronet.

"Of course not," was the reply; but his thoughts were far away, probably with a stout speculator, wearing a suit of gorgeous tartan, and diamond rings on exceedingly dirty hands.

"How shall I stop your mouth?" she said, innocently enough, blushing nevertheless, though

she rarely betrayed confusion, as the words escaped her.

It was impossible to be offended at the quaint, mischievous expression with which Sir Henry looked up in her face, and Jin fairly burst out laughing, while she popped a ripe red strawberry between his lips.

“This will do it for the present!” said she; “and don’t forget you owe me a good turn for giving you what, I believe, you racing gentlemen call ‘the straight tip!’”

CHAPTER IX.

TOUCH AND GO.

A LAWN commanded by the windows of a drawing-room, in which people are settling their plans for the day, can scarcely be considered a fitting locality for the interchange of courtesies not intended for general supervision. The stoppage of Sir Henry's mouth, as described in the preceding chapter, was witnessed by three different persons, all of whom, in their respective degrees, chose to feel aggrieved, disgusted, and surprised. The position was picturesque, no doubt, the accessories in perfect keeping, the strawberry rich and ripe, but such familiarities are apt to breed contempt in the bystanders, especially if of the better-behaved and less tolerant sex. Helen did not approve of these liberties being taken

with papa; Mrs. Lascelles, for the first time, doubted whether she had acted wisely in entering on so close an alliance with this reckless adventuress, remembering a certain fable, in which the horse, having called in the assistance of man against his enemy, was never his own master again; while Uncle Joseph, looking pompously out of window, with his hands in his pockets, turned yellow from jealousy, and became speechless with disgust.

There is no pleasanter hour of the day than that which succeeds breakfast in a country-house, while people are organising the occupations, or amusements, as they call them, that must last till dinner; but with the party collected at The Lilies there seemed to be more than the usual diversity of opinion as to how their time should be spent.

Helen "didn't much care about going to the races—wondered if it would rain—feared it would be hot—did feel a little tired this morning," but, being pressed, was obliged to confess, "she enjoyed yesterday very much!" Still, it

was evident Helen did not want to go, equally evident she would not explain why.

Uncle Joseph, who had meditated a long walk with Miss Ross, combining exercise and sentiment, would have voted persistently against the Heath, but for the episode of the strawberry, which had so roused his wrath. He now declared "it would be absurd to stay away, when at so short a distance," that "they had better go in the same order as yesterday," and that "he would desire luncheon to be put up at once;" Uncle Joseph wisely considering that important meal a necessity of any "outing" in which pleasure was the avowed object.

Mrs. Lascelles did not the least care how she spent her morning, so long as it was passed in the company of Sir Henry. Goldthred, again, was willing to go anywhere or do anything if he might be with Mrs. Lascelles. Altogether everybody's movements seemed dependent on the baronet, who walked coolly up the lawn to the drawing-room windows, pinning the gauze veil more carefully round his hat.

“What time are we to start?” said he, taking it for granted, as he wished to go himself, that everybody else did. “I’m afraid I *must* be on the Course early; but that need not hurry the others. Nelly and I can go in my carriage, and I’ll order it at once. Or I can take Mr. Goldthred, or do anything anybody likes. Who wants to come with me? You mustn’t all speak at once!”

“I don’t care about going at all, papa,” said Helen, but intercepting a glance from their hostess, which ordered Goldthred, as plainly as eyes could speak, to remain and keep her company, added hastily, “unless there’s plenty of room.”

“*Plenty* of room!” echoed Mrs. Lascelles, with her own arrangements in view. “We shall only want one carriage if we take mine. Four of us inside, and Mr. Goldthred, for so short a distance, won’t mind sitting on the box. No, that won’t do; where are we to put Jin?”

“Jin’s not going!” interrupted a voice from the open window of an upper room. “Jin’s got

a headache, and some letters to write. You won't get her to Ascot to-day unless you drag her with wild horses, so you needn't distress yourselves about Jin!"

Uncle Joseph's face turned from yellow to its normal tint of mottled brown. What a trump of a girl he thought her after all! And, fully convinced she was scheming to pass the whole morning with himself, sorely repented he should have so misjudged her a quarter-of-an-hour ago.

His difficulty now was to avoid joining the rest of the party; but bethinking him of a certain substantial pony in the stable, called "Punch," he declared he thought a thorough shaking would do him good, and expressed his intention of riding that animal to the Course.

"Once they're off," argued Uncle Joseph, "they'll never trouble their heads about their host, and then, my pretty Jin, you and I can come to an understanding at last!"

Even with a party of four, however, it takes time to get pleasure-goers under weigh. Mrs. Lascelles forgot her smelling-bottle, Helen mis-

laid a shawl; Sir Henry, on whose account they had all hurried themselves, was ten minutes behind everybody else. The carriage stood a good half-hour at the door before it was fairly started, and Uncle Joseph spent that time in his own dressing-room, with his heart beating like a boy's.

At last the welcome sound of wheels announced that the coast was clear. He sallied forth eagerly, and, considering his years, with no little alacrity, in pursuit of his ladye-love. Not in her bedroom, certainly, for the door stood wide open! Not in the drawing-room—the dining-room—the billiard-room, nor the boudoir! Zounds! not in the conservatory, nor on the lawn! Beads of perspiration broke out on Uncle Joseph's bald head, and he couldn't tell whether it was anger or anxiety that made him feel as if he was going to choke. Panting, protesting, under a burning sun, he followed the shrubby walk that brought him to the hay-field, through which a thoroughfare for foot people led to the high road. Here he ran into the very arms of Goldthred,

coming back by this short cut for his race-glasses, which he had forgotten, while the carriage waited at the nearest angle of the fragrant meadow, flecked and rippled with its new-mown hay.

Uncle Joseph was without his hat. He must have lost his head also, when, thinking it necessary to account for his disturbed appearance, he inquired vehemently—

“Have you seen Miss Ross? I—I forgot to order dinner before starting. I want to find Miss Ross.”

“You won’t overtake her,” answered Goldthred coolly. “She was half way across the next field when I came into this. She must be at the turnpike by now.”

Uncle Joseph waited to hear no more. Breaking wildly from his informant, he dashed off towards the stable, while the latter, recovering his glasses, walked solemnly back to the carriage, and jumped in, as if nothing had happened.

There is, at least, this good quality belonging to a man in love, that he is not easily astonished,

nor does he occupy himself with the affairs of others. Goldthred had forgotten his meeting with Uncle Joseph, and dismissed the whole subject from his mind, before the carriage had got twenty yards or Mrs. Lascelles had spoken as many words.

Now Punch was a good stout cob, of that class and calibre which is so prized by gentlemen who have left off reckoning up their age and weight. After fifty, and over fifteen stone, it is needless to be continually balancing the account. Punch possessed capital legs and feet, sloping shoulders, an intelligent head with very small ears, a strong neck, and an exceedingly round stomach. Such an animal, I confess, I cannot but admire, and have no objection to ride, unless I am in a hurry. Even when time presses I bear the creature no malice, but I fear he hates *me*! Punch could scuttle along at his own pace for a good many miles, safely and perseveringly enough; but against yours, if you were in the habit of riding a thoroughbred hack, he would protest in a very few furlongs. Ob-

viously, to such a quadruped, time was of the utmost importance, and it seemed hard so much of it had to be wasted daily in preparing him for a start.

Docile in his general character, perfectly free from nervousness and vice, he had yet a provoking trick of puffing himself out during the operation of saddling to a size that rendered the roomiest girths in the stable too scanty for his swelling carcase. Ten minutes at least Uncle Joseph and the stable boy butted and tugged and swore, ere, to use the expression of the latter, they could "make tongue and buckle meet." Ten minutes more were wasted in water brushing the pony's mane and blacking his round, well-shaped feet; for the urchin, true to the traditions of his craft, would forego not the smallest rite of that stable discipline in which he had been trained. Altogether, by the time Uncle Joseph was fairly in the saddle for pursuit, Miss Ross had got such a start as, with her light step and agile figure, precluded the possibility of being caught against her will.

Four miles an hour, heel and toe, gracefully and without effort, as if she was dancing, this active young person flitted across the hay-fields, till she reached a humble little cottage standing between the highway and the river's brink. Here she disappeared from Uncle Joseph's sight, who had just viewed her, having hustled Punch along the hot, hard road at a pace which put them both in a white lather.

The rider's first idea was to secure his steed and follow up the chase; but few men act on impulse after—what shall we say?—fifty; and Punch, who had his own opinion about waiting in the sun, might very probably slip his bridle in order to trot home! Reflecting with dismay on such a contingency, in such weather for walking, Uncle Joseph “concluded,” as the Americans say, that he would wait where he was, and watch.

Miss Ross, in the meantime, happily unconscious that she was observed, tapped at the cottage door, which was opened by a dark-eyed urchin of five years or so, whom, to his intense astonishment, she smothered in kisses on the

spot. Mrs. Mole, the owner of the cottage, emerging from the gloom of her back kitchen, was aware of a toss of black curls, and a pair of sturdy, struggling legs, not over clean, in the embrace of a radiant being who had dropped, to all appearance, from the clouds.

“Your servant, miss,” said the old woman, drying her arms on her apron, while she performed a defiant curtsy. “You’ve—a—taken quite a fancy to my little lad, seemingly. Yet I don’t remember to have ever seen you afore.”

I often think the poor resent a liberty with so much more dignity than their betters.

For answer, Jin, whose French education had afforded her many useful little hints, slipped a packet of tea into the old woman’s hand. It was what they drank at The Lilies, strong, fragrant, and five shillings a pound.

“I haven’t the pleasure of knowing you, ma’am,” said she civilly; “but I’ve seen this little angel before, and I can’t help admiring him. Have you no more of them?”

Mrs. Mole was sixty if she was a day; but,

like your grandmother and mine, like everybody's grandmother, Eve herself, she was open to flattery. The supposition that this pretty child might be hers was pleasing; the inference that he had brothers and sisters, possibly younger than himself, gratifying indeed.

"He isn't my own, miss," said she, stroking the child's curls, who clung tight to her gown, with his eyes fixed on Miss Ross. "And more's the pity!—go to the lady, Johnnie, *do!*—for a sweeter babe, and a 'ealthier, you'll not put your 'and on, not from here to Windsor Castle. He ain't got no mother, miss, nor he don't want none, do you, Johnnie? not so long as you've your old Moley to love ye—that's what he calls me, miss. *My* name's Mole, miss, askin' your pardon."

The child, who was a bold little fellow enough, having inspected the visitor thoroughly, as children always do inspect an object of apprehension, now took courage to seat himself on her knee, with his finger in his mouth and his eyes fixed on his boots, in undivided attention.

Miss Ross turned the plain little frock down

to where, below the sunburned neck, his skin was white and pure as marble, all but one mottled mark, the size of a five-franc piece. Then she burst out crying, and Johnny, sprawling in haste to the floor, howled hideously for company.

“Deary, deary me!” ejaculated Mrs. Mole, completely softened, and, to use her own expression, “upset,” by these signals of distress. “Don’t ye take on so, miss. Whist! Johnnie, this moment, or I’ll give you something to cry for! Take a glass of water, miss. You’ve been walking too fast in the sun—or say the word, and I’ll make ye a cup o’ tea in five minutes.”

“A glass of water, please,” gasped Miss Ross; and while the old woman went to fetch it, followed by Johnnie, the young one summoned all her self-command not to betray her secret and her relationship to the child.

It was her own Gustave. Of that she could have no doubt since she had laid bare the mark between his shoulders. Perhaps she was sure of him yesterday, shouting at the cottage-door while

the carriage passed ; perhaps she had been sure all last night, waking every ten minutes from a dream of her boy ; all this morning, resolving that nothing should prevent her seeing him to-day ; no, not the certainty of calumny, exposure, open shame ! Had it been otherwise, she must have broken down more foolishly, more completely. Now she recovered herself, as she had often done before in positions of far greater difficulty. When she took the glass of water from Mrs. Mole's sympathising hand, her voice was steady, her face perfectly calm and serene.

“ You are right,” she said, “ the sun *is* hot, and I walked here very fast. The sight of this pretty child, too, was rather trying. He reminds me of—of—a nephew I lost long ago. Thank you. I'm better now, but I *should* like to sit down and rest for half an hour, if I'm not in your way. So—so—this little fellow isn't yours, Mrs. Mole, after all.”

Mrs. Mole dearly loved a gossip. So would you or I, if we spent our days in a two-roomed cottage, with no companion but a child, no

amusement whatever, no occupation but cleaning household utensils for the purpose of dirtying them forthwith, no daily paper, no exchange of ideas, no exercise of the intellect, beyond a weekly effort to keep awake during the parson's sermon. Gossip, indeed! If it was not for gossip how many good, industrious, hard-living women would go melancholy mad?

“He's not mine, miss. I wishes he wur,” she answered, with an elbow in the palm of each hand, an attitude Mrs. Mole considered favourable to conversation. “But, whatever I should do without Johnnie, or Johnnie without me, I know no more than the dead. The sense of that there child, miss, and the ways of 'un, you'd think as he was twelve year old at least. To see him take off his little boots, and fold up his little clothes, every article, and come an' say his little prayers on my knee afore ever he goes to his little bed, it's wonderful, that's what it is!”

The tears were rising to Jin's eyes once more. “Who taught him to say his prayers?” she asked, keeping them down with an effort.

“Well, he didn’t know none when he came here first,” answered Mrs. Mole apologetically. “He’s very young a-course, and he hadn’t been taught none maybe. But, Lor’ bless ye, that there child didn’t want no teaching. Ah! there’s children in heaven, I humbly hope, and I’ll never believe but they’re like my Johnnie!”

“A little tidier I should suppose,” thought Miss Ross, but she could have hugged this plain old woman nevertheless, for her kindly, honest heart.

“I can see he’s well taken care of,” she observed, turning the child’s clothes with a mother’s hand. “His skin shows how healthy he is, and he’s as clean as a new pin.”

Mrs. Mole glanced sharply in her visitor’s face. “I ask yer pardon, ma’am,” she said, “I kep on calling of you ‘*miss*,’ and maybe you’ve children of your own.”

Hugging the boy’s head to her breast Jin took no notice of this remark, but asked in turn, how long the child had been there.

The question, though simple, produced a narrative of considerable volume, digressive, complicated, not free from tautology, and ample, even exuberant in detail. It comprised Mrs. Mole's girlhood, early life, peculiar character, and extraordinary experiences, together with a sketch of the late Mr. Mole's biography, his failure in the undertaking business, and the reasons which prompted her, the narrator, to accept him for a husband; the birth of two children, with red noses, the image of Mole, both of whom, to use her own expression, she had "buried;" the unaccountable disappearance of their father, taking with him whatever portable property was in their joint possession, including bed and bedding, an eight-day clock, and a warming-pan; the deceitfulness of the male sex in general, and their sad tendency to falsehood, coupled with inebriety; the inscrutable ways of Providence, by which it seemed ordered that her own sex should be "put upon" in all relations of life; the difficulty, which no one could contradict, of earning bread, as a lone woman, with

rent and taxes to pay, everything rising in price, except her own labour, and an inflexible determination to keep herself respectable; the matrimonial offer she had received not longer back than five years gone last Easter Monday, from an energetic bargeman, of imposing appearance, and a bad habit of swearing "awful," which offer she could not prudently entertain, partly from uncertainty as to Mole's fate, partly from suspicion of the proposer's solvency, not to say sobriety; the depression of spirits resulting from this disappointment of the affections, and the "lonesomeness" of the cottage in the long winter nights, when she felt as if she "couldn't hardly a-bear it without a drop o' comfort." Finally, the determination she was driven to of taking in a child to nurse, "as should make the little place seem home-like, and help to get a livin' for us both."

"And it's past belief, miss," added Mrs. Mole, "as I put a notice in the weekly paper, an' never heard no more, till a matter of ten weeks ago, when a gentleman brought this here little

lad to the door, and left him for me to nurse and look after, quite confident and agreeable. 'Mrs. Mole,' says he—'your name's Mole, or I'm misinformed.' 'Yes, sir,' says I, 'you're right enough so fur as you know.' 'Mrs. Mole,' says he, 'I leave the child with you, an' I've no call to bid you take care of him, for I see it in your face, and you'll be as good as his own mother to him, supposin' he ever had one.' With that he slips a sovereign into my hand. I'm not deceivin' you, miss, and I drops him a curtsy, an', says I, 'Perhaps you'll favour me,' says I, 'with the babe's name,' says I, 'for I wouldn't call him out of it,' says I. It's my belief, miss, as the gentleman wasn't used to childer', an' didn't make no account of such things as nameses, for he thought a bit, an' 'Moses,' says he, 'that's the boy's name,' says he; but he answers much kinder to Johnnie, miss, as you can see for yourself. He was a hasty gentleman, seemingly, an' harbitrary, but a pleasant way with him; an' the child took on an' pined a bit for the first day or two, when he wur gone to

London or what-not, but he loves his old Moley best now, don't ye, deary? an' will tell ye, plain as he can speak, he don't want to leave his old Moley, never no more."

Miss Ross was puzzled. But for the mark on the boy's back, and something in her own heart, she would have believed herself mistaken after all.

Who could this man be, then? and how had he obtained possession of her boy? her boy, whom she had mourned so bitterly, believing that he slept beneath the waters of the turbulent Rhone.

"Have you never seen this gentleman again?" she asked, still pressing the child's head to her breast, a position he accepted with perfect equanimity.

"Seen him!" repeated Mrs. Mole. "He comes here once-a-week regular and pays, I'll say that for him—pays like the bank. 'Handsome is as handsome does,' says I, an he's a real gentleman, I make no doubt."

"Is he young or old?" pursued Miss Ross. "Tall or short? Dark or fair? How is he dressed? In one word—what is he like?"

Mrs. Mole, whose memory and perceptive powers in general were failing a little, thereby affording wider scope to her imagination, plunged at once into a comprehensive description, much ornamented and idealised, of the person who had lately become so important an object in her quiet every-day life—a description from which Miss Ross felt she could not have identified any individual simply human; but which was happily cut short by a step on the high road, and a click at the little green gate giving access to the front door of the cottage.

“It’s not his day, miss?” said Mrs. Mole, pulling her guest to the window. “But here he is, for sure, and you can judge for yourself!”

One glance was enough. Miss Ross, dropping Johnnie (in the safest possible attitude) on the floor, fled to the back kitchen panting for breath.

It was Achille! There could be no doubt about it! The same jaunty air, the same gaudy dress, the same manner, gestures, ways, even to the cigar between his teeth—a little stouter, perhaps, and more prosperous looking than when she saw

him last; but still unmistakeably the husband who deceived, outraged, deserted her, to whom, if she were really married, she felt she had better have tied a mill-stone round her neck, and plunged herself into the sea!

Escape was her first impulse—escape at any price! He must never find her! He must on no account see her here! With a hasty farewell to Mrs. Mole, who thought all the better of her visitor for the modesty that forbade her to confront a strange gentleman, she vanished through the back-door of the cottage, as Picard, for it was no other, entered at the front, and running down a stony path direct to the river-side found herself wishing only that she could swim, so as to make her plunge, and strike out at once for the opposite shore. Glancing wistfully around, there was yet something in the whole situation that struck her as ludicrous in the extreme. Hemmed in by cottage gardens, escape was out of the question on either side, while to retrace her steps along the stony pathway was to return into the jaws of the enemy. At her feet, the river looked cool,

shallow, and inviting. Jin wondered if it would be possible to wade. In her perplexity she clasped her hands and began to laugh. Then she thought of her boy and began to cry. This young person was by no means a subject for hysterics ; but her feelings had been cruelly wrought on during the last half-hour, and there is no saying what might have happened if assistance had not arrived at the opportune moment from an unlooked-for quarter.

It has been already stated that Helen Hallaton showed less inclination to go to the races than is usual with a young lady, who has a new bonnet in a box up-stairs, and an excuse for taking it out. Frank Vanguard too, contrary to all precedent, declined driving his team to the Course, and remained tranquilly in barracks with the orderly-officer and the mess-waiters, whilst everybody else was off for the day. I do not suppose these young people *understood* each other ; but I fancy they *thought* they did, and perhaps this was the reason one only started with her companions under pressure, while the other preferred a skiff

and a pair of sculls (not an out-rigger observe, in which there is only room for the oarsman) to the box of his drag, and a sustained contest for many miles with the iron mouth of his near wheeler.

This young officer then, stripped to the very verge of decency, came flashing up the stream with steady strokes and strong that brought him alongside of Mrs. Mole's cottage, within a few seconds of Jin's flight from that sanctuary. It is not to be supposed that any amount of preoccupation would prevent our floating dragoon from resting on his oars to admire the rare and radiant vision: a handsome girl clad in bright transparencies, exhaled as it would seem by an ardent sunshine from the teeming margin of Father Thames.

He thought of Rhodes and Helios, and the picture in last year's exhibition. So thinking, he backed water, of course, with the utmost energy.

"Captain Vanguard," pleaded a voice, he had thought yesterday not without its charm, "will you be a good Samaritan and give me a passage to The Lilies?"

“He would be delighted.” Of course he would! To take such a sitter ought to be pleasure enough; but better still to have so good an excuse for calling at The Lilies and finding Miss Hallaton at home.

“I’ve been visiting a poor woman in that cottage,” said Miss Ross, giving him her hand as she stepped lightly into the fragile bark he brought so skilfully to her feet. “But it really is *too* hot for walking back along the road. I’m in luck. If I hadn’t seen you, I do believe I should have jumped in to swim!”

“I’m the lucky one, Miss Ross,” answered Frank, looking very manly and handsome, as with lengthened strokes he shot into the stream. “I’m very glad now I didn’t go to the races. It’s as well too that I brought this skiff instead of the out-rigger!”

And Uncle Joseph, quarrelling fiercely with Punch, beheld it all, boiling, chafing, growling, wondering at the perfidy of woman, cursing the imbecility of man.

CHAPTER X.

AFLOAT.

It was a pleasant trip for waterman and freight. Over-handed sculls, light sitter, and buoyant boat, Frank laid himself out to his work as if he liked it; and Miss Ross, dipping her white fingers in the pleasant ripple, looked kindly into the oarsman's eyes, while her lissome figure bent and swayed in graceful unison with his stroke.

Steadily, smoothly, swimmingly, they shot on, through deep, cool, silent shade, where overhanging boughs bent longingly towards the laughing waters as they ran past; across broad burnished sheets of gold, where dazzling sunshine flashed and glittered on the stream; over placid pools, translucent and serene, where the

drooping water-lily scarce ruffled a languid petal to kiss the lingering current stealing by; under high fragrant banks, rich in tints of pearl and pink, emerald and ruby, of all the brightest, fairest hues that Nature lavishes on the flower, like the gem; past lawn and villa, past water-mill and meadow land, past nibbling sheep and wading cattle, a barking dog, a boat-house, an unsuccessful angler in a punt; and so to a fair expanse of smooth untroubled water, a mile below the lock.

There are voyages on which we all embark unconsciously to ourselves, careless of life-belt or sea-stores, making no provision for the climes to which they lead; voyages that begin with a fair wind, a summer sea, and a smiling sky; that end, too often, in loss of crew and cargo, in shipwreck, disaster, and despair. Miss Ross, though she scarcely suspected it, had even now set foot on a plank which was to sink with her hereafter, and leave her choking in the dark pitiless waves.

“*Isn't* it nice?” said she, taking off a jaunty

little hat, to smooth her hair back with dripping hands. "I delight in the motion—something between swimming and riding. I should like to row, myself. Don't you find it hard work? You *must* be tired. Let us stop here a little in the shade."

A longer pull would have failed to tire Frank, who was no mean waterman, and in excellent condition,

"But then the situation had its charm,"

and to rest in the shade with Miss Ross was no unpleasant break in a day's work.

She fanned him with her hat, rocking the boat to and fro as it lay under the bank, sheltered by a thick screen of fragrant, flickering lime branches.

"I can't thank you enough," continued Jin, in her most winning tones. "I'm so fond of the water, I think I was meant for a sailor. I should like to go on it every day."

"I'll take you!" said Frank, as what else could he say? "Every day, and all day long. Shall we fix to-morrow, at the same place and

the same time?" He was laughing, but thought, nevertheless, it would be no bad way of spending the summer, while so unfortunate as to be quartered at Windsor. Ah! if it had only been Helen! But it wasn't. So there was no use in thinking about that!

"We can't always do what we like," answered Jin, looking pensively into the depths of the Thames. "At least women can't—certainly I can't! Think how I should be pitched into when I got home! You wouldn't like me to be scolded for your sake, Captain Vanguard?"

"I think I *should*," replied the inexcusable young officer. "I think I should like to scold you myself, if I had the right."

"Ah! you'd like making up again, I dare say!" laughed Jin, and, with that, the black eyes delivered one telling shot straight into Frank's, and were instantly averted.

"We'll quarrel as much as you please, on those terms," said he gaily, and, for aught I can guess, might have proceeded to premature reconciliation forthwith, but that she knew the

game so well, and checked him at the right moment.

“I quarrel with my *friends*, Captain Vanguard,” she objected; “and you are only an acquaintance as yet. It takes me a long time to become really intimate with people. I wonder if I should like you more when I knew you better?”

“I’m sure you would,” answered Frank, rattling the boat’s chain, as he prepared for work again. “You would improve me so, do you see; and I am so willing to be improved. You wouldn’t be able to do without me in a week.”

“I don’t think that would be a good plan,” she said, in rather a mournful tone, gazing dreamily at him with her great black eyes, as if she saw miles into the future. “I can take good care of myself—nobody better. But if I like people at all I like them very much. It’s my nature—I wish it wasn’t.”

“Then you don’t like *me* at all?” he replied, in a low voice, bending down to alter the

stretcher at his feet. "Just my luck!" couldn't he leave edged tools alone? Li very child, he must needs play with them, because they lay to his hand. How we all our fingers without the slightest occasion after we believe ourselves old enough and enough to run alone!

"If I did, I shouldn't tell you so," answered Jin, lowering her voice in harmony with "Do you think a woman never keeps a secret? Captain Vanguard, I can't quite make you puzzle me more than anybody I know."

Frank, sculling leisurely on, began to think this was very pleasant. It gratified his supposition there should be depths unfathomable in his character; it flattered him to learn that a clever, accomplished woman had thought it worth while to try and search them to the bottom. Perhaps the exercise flushed it a little but there was a very becoming colour in his face while he replied—

"The plainest fellow in the world, Miss Li, and the honestest, as you'll find, when you l

me better. I may chaff a little sometimes, like other people, but everybody can tell what's chaff and what's earnest. *You* can, I'm sure."

She nodded and smiled. "Are you in earnest *now*?" she said, looking with real pleasure into the comely, honest young face.

"I am, I'll swear!" he exclaimed, forgetting that nothing had yet been spoken to be earnest about. "What I think I say, and what I say I mean!"

"I wish—no—I wonder, whether I can believe you," she answered very softly, and again the black eyes seemed to pierce right through his jersey to his heart.

Meanwhile their boat shot merrily over the dead water, urged by her oarsman's skilled and vigorous strokes. Jin watched with critical approval the play of his muscular shoulders, the ease and freedom of his movements, the strength, symmetry, and youthful vitality of the man.

"Do you like poetry?" she asked, after a minute's silence.

"Poetry?" repeated Frank doubtfully. "I

don't mind it," but qualified the admission by adding, "glees, and songs, and that."

She was rather thinking aloud than speaking to her companion, while she continued—

"I always admire that description of the Scandinavian warrior's accomplishments: there is something so simple about it, and so manly:—

‘These arts are mine, to wield the steel,
To curb the warlike horse;
To swim the lake, or skate on heel,
To urge my rapid course;
To draw the bow, to fling the spear,
To brush with oar the main:
All these are mine, and shall I bear
A Danish maid's disclaim?’

I wonder, for my part, that the Danish maid could resist him."

"Oh, I don't!" answered Frank. "Danish maids are pretty tough, I should think; spotted too, probably, like Danish dogs. Who did you say the fellow was, and what did he brush?"

"I said he was a soldier," replied Miss Ross demurely. "Most likely a mounted volunteer."

"And who was the lady?—the Danish maid, I mean."

“I don’t know—I wish *I* was!” she answered, with a sigh.

Frank pondered, resting on his oars. It was not this young officer’s habit to puzzle his wits unnecessarily in the solution of intricate problems, and whatever genius he possessed was in no way akin to that of a mathematician, who takes pleasure in the actual process by which results are worked out. To ride a comrade’s horse “truly through” in a steeple-chase, to make the most of his own in a run, to lead his squadron straight, and as fast as his colonel would permit, to have his troop at the highest possible pitch of efficiency, befriending the men, pacifying their wives, and keeping an especial eye on buckles, to drive the regimental coach without “putting it over,” and never to turn his back on a friend, comprised the simple articles of his creed; nor, until he met Helen Hallaton at her father’s house, had it ever entered his head there could be an interest in life more engrossing than regimental duty and field-sports. But he was learning to *think* now, and, like all

beginners, found himself somewhat at sea in the process.

What was this strange, subtle intoxication of the brain, rather than the heart, which stole over him so gently, while he looked in that pale, eager, restless face, not a yard off, over the stretcher yonder, turned so wistfully towards his own, while he caught the tones of that low, pleading voice, blending so musically with the jerk of his oars, the leap and gurgle of the stream beneath his prow? Was this the enchantment he had a vague recollection of as practised by the Syrens in his school-books, by the Mermaidens of nursery lore, by the Ondines and Lurlines, the Wilis and Walpurgis of the stage? Must he learn so soon, while yet in the flush of youth and hope, that the coquette is immortal as the vampire, equally thirsty, tenacious, and insatiable? Was this the same mysterious influence exercised on him by Miss Hallaton? or was it not rather a dazzling and illusive imitation, resembling truth as the scenery of a theatre resembles Nature's landscapes; its tinsel and glitter,

the splendour of real gems and gold? Well, it was no use troubling one's head about these matters. If you once begin analysing, what becomes of everything we call pleasure? Who would drink wine if he knew how it was made, or, indeed, a glass of pure water, if he reflected on the mingled gases and impurities of which that innocent element is composed?

Sculling on towards the lock, Frank Vanguard was content to leave his own questions unanswered, and abandon himself to the claims of his companion and the fascination of the hour.

With her it was different. Young in years, Miss Ross was yet an old stager in that broad road between the roses, along which it is all down hill. She had travelled it many a time, usually at her own pace, and, so to speak, with horses perfectly well broke. She knew, none better, each smiling nook, each romantic peep of the country on either side,—this awkward turn, that comfortable resting-place, when to put the drag on with judicious caution, where to make

the most of her ground at a gallop. She liked to feel her blood stir to the old familiar pastime once more, liked it none the worse that the team was getting out of her hand, the pace no longer at her own control.

All the while it was no more the real Frank Vanguard who excited these welcome sensations in her ill-regulated mind than it was Uncle Joseph, or young Goldthred, or Punch! Men and women, we are but children in our dearest dreams, and Jin was no wiser than the rest of us. She had dressed her doll in the gaudy habiliments that suited her own taste, and persuaded herself the creation of her fancy was a tangible and existing truth.

Frank Vanguard seemed at present her ideal of the robust Scandinavian, polished up a little and modernised, of course. It would be a duty, she considered, to sacrifice him in accordance with her principles of manslaughter. It would be a pleasure to watch the tortures of her victim at the stake. Perhaps, after all, she would grant him a milder punishment than the rest. She

wondered more than ever at the northern girl's insensibility to her stalwart admirer.

"No," she murmured, after a pause, during which Frank had set the boat going once more; "I don't think I should have snubbed him long, if I had been the Danish maid."

"I believe you *are* the Danish maid!" said he. "You're not *quite* English, I'm sure, though I can't tell how I know. You're not Scotch, for you don't speak the language. Welsh? No. You're scarcely my idea of a Welsh woman; at least, judging by those I've seen with wooden collars and milkpails in London."

"Guess again."

"Irish; that's it. 'Kathleen Mavourneen,' 'Arrah na Pogue,' 'Norah Creina,' and 'The Shan Van Voght!'"

"You might have added, 'Teddy, you Gander,'" she replied, laughing. "No; what should make you think I'm Irish? I never was in Ireland in my life? I don't mind telling *you* I'm more a French woman than anything else. In honest truth, I've no country,

no relations, no belongings, no friends," and she carolled out in her rich clear voice—

"I care for nobody, no, not I,
And nobody cares for me."

"That's impossible!" exclaimed Frank, pushing the boat out of certain shallows into which he had inadvertently guided it, with the blade of his oar, and looking over his shoulder to see how far the lock was ahead. "That's simply impossible!" he repeated, as they shot back into deep water, where, nevertheless, the stream ran very swift and strong. "I should say a great many people did. More than you think, I am sure. Steady! Miss Ross. Let him alone, please! He'll swamp us in two seconds, if he tries to come on board. Ah! I thought how it would be; and, of course, she can't swim!"

The last sentence Frank sputtered out with a mouthful of Thames water, shaking his head the while, to clear his eyes, as he came to the surface from an immersion, sudden as involuntary, consequent on the indiscreet proceedings of his passenger. Since the adventure of Leda down

to our own times, when Landseer has consigned him to an immortality of suffering in the eagle's clutch, it appears that the swan has been a consistent admirer of beauty, both in and out of his proper element. He drew the car of Venus, he piloted the galley of Cleopatra, he spied Miss Ross glittering like a jewel on the bosom of Father Thames. Exasperated, as it would seem, by Vanguard's good fortune, he made rapidly for the boat containing this treasure, wreathing his neck, ruffling his wings in angry curves, and tearing up the water like a river steamboat. Miss Ross laughed merrily, and splashed the enemy with considerable energy. The swan advanced, the lady leaned over, Frank backed water hard with one scull, a heavy lurch, a little scream, a sway, a surge, and the rushing stream rose over the boat's side from stem to stern, while a wisp of muslins, a gaudy hat, and a tangle of black hair, were already splashing, struggling, sinking, a dozen yards farther down the river in the direction of London and the Nore. Frank was a good swimmer, Miss Ross

possessed courage and presence of mind. The shallows were close, and a punt was already putting out from the neighbouring lock, where the man in charge had a view of the accident, nevertheless it was not without the exertion of considerable strength and skill, without great personal risk, a very sufficient wetting, and the swallowing of at least a quart of dirty water, that Vanguard succeeded in placing the lady on her feet in the shallows before mentioned, thanking Heaven fervently in his heart that they were not five strokes farther off, and that he had been enabled to reach them with his burden by aid of a strong stream running in his favour. Draggled, limp, exhausted, dripping from top to toe, Miss Ross clung tight to her preserver, with the more reason that although the stream here scarcely reached her knees, it ran so hard she found some difficulty in keeping her feet. She behaved, thought Frank, very pluckily and well. No nonsense, no hysterics, no theatrical gratitude of gasps and groans. She held one of his hands, indeed, very tight, and her face was paler than ever, but she only said—

“How stupid of me to upset the boat! What a ducking we’ve both had, Captain Vanguard! You’ll never take me on the water again.”

“*Won’t I?*” thought Frank, helping her into the punt which had now come to the rescue, and wondering at the masses of black hair, released and straightened by immersion, that hung round her in such unusual length and volume.

Like most bachelors, Frank entertained exaggerated notions as to feminine delicacy, both of mind and body. In the present instance, he was satisfied that unless Miss Ross could be enveloped in blankets, dosed with hot brandy-and-water, and taken home on the instant, death must inevitably ensue. Assisted by the lock’s-man and his wife, who, without partaking of his fears, joined heartily in his exertions, he had Miss Ross swathed up like a mummy in less than ten minutes; and, by her own desire, helped her to walk the short distance between the lock and The Lilies at as good a pace, and, indeed, almost with the same results, as if they had been

waltzing. Frank found so much to think of, that it was not till he reached the gate he remembered his own dishevelled plight, and the unusual costume, or rather want of it, in which he meditated a morning call. Reflecting that his straw hat was gone, that he was bare to the shoulders, that his dress consisted only of a light Jersey, flannel trowsers, and canvas shoes, the whole of which, after being thoroughly saturated, had dried on a dusty road, he was perhaps hardly disappointed to learn that the ladies were at the races, and nobody had stayed at home except Mrs. Lascelles's maid.

“Then I'll wish you good-bye, Miss Ross,” said Frank. “I can't do anything more for you now. Only mind you go to bed till dinner-time, and I hope you haven't caught cold.”

“Won't you come in?” asked Miss Ross. “They'll give you some sherry, or brandy, or whatever you ought to have. I'm sure you must want it.”

“Never felt so well in my life!” he answered gaily. “Besides, I must go back to recover my

floating capital: jacket, hat, boat, stretcher, and pair of sculls, not to mention your pretty parasol. They were all swimming different ways when I saw them last, but I dare say they'll get together again on this side of Staines. We landed the cargo, which was the great thing, but I wish we could have managed to keep it dry."

He was turning away, with a light laugh, when she called him back. "I've never thanked you," said she, "but I know you risked your own life to-day to save mine. If you had lost it—I—I should like to have gone down too!"

He started. There was a tremble in her voice that seemed very strange to him, nor was the sensation without its charm; but he had not yet contemplated the subject from this romantic point of view, so he could think of no better answer than to put out his hand.

She caught it eagerly, and for one half-second pressed it against her heart, while she murmured—

"Good-bye, Captain Vanguard, good-bye; when shall I see you again?"

The dark, pleading eyes were turned on him so kindly, the pale, bewitching face was drawing so near his own—close, closer yet, as he bent towards it—and so their lips met in one long, clinging, and totally unjustifiable kiss. Then Miss Ross, blushing to her ears, scudded up-stairs like a lap-wing, while Frank walked dreamily away from the front door, feeling as if he had behaved very badly about something or somebody, and couldn't bring his mind to regret it as he ought.

CHAPTER XI.

MANŒUVRING.

WE must return to Uncle Joseph, endeavouring to compose his mind by riding Punch at an uncomfortable jog-trot along a succession of shady lanes calculated to bring him back by a round-about way to his own dwelling-place. This *détour*, much against the pony's inclination—for that sagacious animal protested at every homeward turn—he took advisedly and with deliberation, that he might have time to ponder on his position and his wrongs. Like most men who have passed middle age, he set a great value on the blessing of health, and prudently reflected that a towering passion, an obstinate cob, and a broiling sun, formed a combination likely to produce one of those bilious attacks which lay the

sufferer on his back for a week, and make him as yellow as a guinea for a fortnight. Therefore he thought it wise to cool down in solitude, and consider his own case dispassionately, before deciding on a future line of conduct. Had he been a young man he would have broken with Jin on the spot. Storms of invective, reproach, and recrimination, would have ensued, to be succeeded by thorough reconciliation and a subsequent state of slavery more degrading than the first, after much unnecessary wear and tear of body and mind. But Uncle Joseph had arrived at a period of life when, highly as we prize our hearts, we set also a sufficient value on our livers, and see no reason why lacerated affections should be aggravated by an impaired digestion. There is much knowledge of human nature comprised in Sir John Suckling's shrewd and suggestive stanza :—

“Why so pale and wan, fond lover,
Prithee, why so pale?
Will, if looking well can't move her,
Looking ill prevail?”

That is doubtless the least decisive defeat which is most skilfully concealed, and one of the first

principles in manœuvring is to "show a front," the steadier the better, however severe may be the loss under which you are compelled to retire.

By the time Uncle Joseph had ridden a mile (and at Punch's pace, when turned away from home, this distance afforded some leisure for reflection) he made up his mind not to put himself in a passion. Ere he had gone two, and settled another difference with the pony by diverse jobs in the mouth and kicks in the stomach, he sought and found many excuses for the young lady's conduct, and almost decided not to quarrel with her at all.

If less agile and less ardent, these mature lovers are, at any rate, more patient, more considerate, more forbearing, than their impetuous juniors. They take thought, they give time, they make allowances, they have learned one of life's most important lessons, only set forth towards the end of the chapter, "Not to expect too much." Could they but keep the smooth skin, the jaunty step, the trim waist, the clear eye, the glossy locks, the buoyancy, the sparkle,

and the bloom! Alas! alas! turn it how we will, there is no disputing that the one quality of youth outweighs all advantages of experience, wisdom, fame, intellect; and that the figure 50, so acceptable in a *rouleau*—

“Sounds ill in love, whate'er it may in money.”

While he thus rode along the shady lanes, Uncle Joseph's cogitations, interrupted only by the carelessness and other shortcomings of Punch, jumbled themselves together into something like the following soliloquy :—

“Comes down to breakfast as sulky as a bear; ‘low spirits’ the women call it, and ‘over-fatigue,’ but I know what that means—restless manner, wandering eye, and not half an appetite. Scarcely truffles enough, by the way, in that pie; mustn't forget to write about it. (Hold up, you brute. Such another as *that* and you'll be on the top of your stupid head!) Then off she goes in a desperate fidget to write letters up-stairs. Up-stairs indeed! I ought to have known at once there was something wrong, for I never remember her in a fidget before; and as for letters, I should

suppose she was the worst correspondent in Europe! Then, after everybody's back is turned, off like a shot through the hay-fields, under a tropical sun, and down to the river. Some sense in that if she'd jumped in for a cold bath. I shouldn't have pulled her out; yes, I should! The girl's a dear girl, and a pretty one. It mayn't be so bad after all. She could *not* have looked at me as she did last night, when she pinned the pinks in my button-hole, unless she liked me. Why does my tailor never put a loop in? Does he think I'm so old nobody gives me flowers, or is he a deep dog, who reflects I ought to have the pull of their being pinned in? She shall never pin one in again for *me* though, unless she can give an account of to-day's doings! What was she about in that cottage, I should like to know, exposing herself to infection of all kinds, and why did she stay so long? Then, who ever heard of a young lady rushing down to the water-side, and jumping into the first boat that passes (I wonder she didn't upset it, and I almost wish she had!), with a half-naked man

she never saw before in her life? Who *was* the man, I wonder? I could only make out that he had very few clothes on! Miss Ross! Miss Ross! you are not treating me well! Perhaps you think I'm an indulgent old fool, and only too pleased to let you do as you like. So I would, my pretty Jin, so I would, if I had your perfect confidence, and felt I could depend upon you. I'm not the least a jealous fellow, I know, though of course I don't want you to make up to anybody else; but I shouldn't mind your pretty little coaxing manner, and your flirting ways. In fact, I rather like them. No, I don't, not a bit, so it's no use saying so. But I could be very good to her if she cared for me. Perhaps she doesn't, after all. And yet that seems unlikely. Julia Bright did, and Jemima Fetters, and I think Miss Flouncer *would* have, if I'd been more in her set. Can I be so much altered since then?" And thus Uncle Joseph, with his reins on the pony's neck, dropping gradually into a walk, pursued a train of varied thoughts, retrospective and otherwise, comprising diverse

incongruous subjects—his shares, his dinner, his present hopes, the state of his health, the increasing proportions of his figure, Punch's failings, Jin's perfidy, the columns of his banker's book, wine, trades-people, double-entry, boyhood's pastimes, manhood's gains, his last investment, and his first romance.

The afternoon began to wane ere Punch's willing head was in the manger, and Uncle Joseph rang the bell at his own hall-door. The race-goers having returned early, because this, the last day, afforded but a meagre bill of fare for sport, were yet so worn out with the heat that they had retired to their respective dressing-rooms. Was Miss Ross back? Well, sir, Miss Ross came home some time ago, but she seemed to have met with—with something of an accident. No occasion to be alarmed, said the butler, but miss was wet through, however—not a dry stitch on her, the maid told him—and went to her own room at once. Could his master see her? The well-drilled servant thought not. Miss Ross had given orders she was on no account to be

disturbed till dinner; and he, the butler, rather opined she had gone to bed: adding, with a sense of what was due to his own importance, that, "for his part, he was thankful it wasn't no worse!"

But Miss Ross had not the least intention of going to bed, nor could she have slept a wink on the softest couch that ever was spread. Busy thoughts were teeming in her brain, strange contradictory feelings thrilling at her heart. She was half pleased with herself, half angry, sometimes absolutely revelling in the recollections of the day, sometimes wishing she had never gone to the cottage at all. In her dark eyes shone a light that told of some new fire kindled within; on her delicate cheek, usually so pale, burned that blush of pleasure which is all the dearer and deeper for being tinged by self-reproach and shame.

Mrs. Lascelles saw the change at a glance, and knew with womanly instinct that something more had happened to her friend than a common river accident, however dangerous it might have been.

Without removing her bonnet, she settled herself in an arm-chair the moment she entered the other's room, determined to find out everything that had taken place. As the two women sat together in that light, cheerful, prettily-furnished chamber, they afforded no unsightly study of effect, as resulting from contrast, of the respective proportion in which feminine attractions are enhanced by dress and *déshabillé*. The fairer beauty wore a costume I am constrained to admire, but shrink from attempting to describe, inasmuch as it seemed to combine the different attractions by which victory is assured at balls, dinners, regattas, races, suburban breakfasts, county archery-meetings, the morning cricket-match, and the afternoon tea. How it was put together, and of what fabric, I am brutally ignorant: you might as well ask me to articulate the anatomy of a humming-bird or describe the dress of a dragon-fly; but I am prepared to protest that it was voluminous, enchanting, transparent, and that there was *mauve* in it. To have white teeth, red lips, dancing blue eyes, rich

brown hair, and a bloom like a peach, is all very well, but does it seem quite fair play to dispose around these natural advantages certain delicate and filmy draperies, that set them off as a summer haze glorifies some Devonshire valley under the noon-day sun? "Scaldings!" quoth honest Jack-tar, creeping along the deck with anything that may be spilt. "*Væ Victis!*" says Brennus, turning up his moustache at the gates of Rome. "Look out for yourselves, gentlemen!" seems to be the interpretation of either warning, "and make the best terms you can!" For my part, I think it is wise policy to surrender at discretion, and sink point with the first clash of steel.

Mrs. Lascelles, you see, shone in mail and plate; armed, so to speak, at all points. Miss Ross, on the other hand, was in light skirmishing order—none the less dangerous, however—and prepared, you may be sure, for immediate attack. Her black hair fell about her in shining folds, over a white surface fretted with frills and laces, set off by knots of cherry-coloured ribbon; a band of the same hue was drawn loosely round

her slender waist; open sleeves disclosed a pair of ivory arms to the elbows; and she had slippers on, but no stockings. I think I have described her enough.

“So he pulled you out, dear, just as you were sinking, propped you in his arms, with your head on his shoulder, and both did the regular stage business, of course: ‘My precious!’—‘my preserver!’—‘awakened feelings!’—‘eternal gratitude!’ and a duet at the foot-lights. Seriously, Jin, it is quite a romance in these prosaic days.”

Mrs. Lascelles found herself amused as well as interested by the glowing colours, not devoid of caricature, in which Miss Ross described her late adventure and its hero.

“Nothing of the kind,” protested Jin, with energy. “On the contrary, I never saw a man take anything so quietly. You’d think he pulled people out of the Thames once a week. I don’t suppose the thing will ever enter his head again.”

“That would be very uncomplimentary, my dear,” answered Mrs. Lascelles; “and you can’t really suppose anything of the sort. Now, honour!

Don't you expect him to call here to-morrow morning, the very first thing after breakfast?"

"Why shouldn't he?" replied Jin hotly. "It wouldn't follow that he meant more than an act of common courtesy, which he must have paid any lady after so—so ludicrous a performance as ours!"

Here she burst out laughing, but did not thereby in the least deceive her friend.

"Jin," said the latter, after a pause, during which each had scanned the other narrowly, "what do you think of him?"

"Think of who?" said Jin. It was bad grammar, but people are very obstinate about grammar in common conversation, particularly when they turn away their heads with a blush.

"Who?" repeated Mrs. Lascelles. "Why, this new admirer, of course. This hero, perhaps I ought rather to say, this Leander, this Windsor Bridge swan, this duck of a dragoon! Shall you be able to abide by our compact, and treat him like the rest? Jin, Jin, I should be sorry for you, my poor girl, very sorry, of course, but yet

I should laugh, I am afraid, too, if you were to be caught at last, and fall in love—souse!—as you fell into the Thames!”

“I don’t know what you mean,” answered Miss Ross, with great dignity. “The one I couldn’t help, and it would have been hard on me to be drowned. If I did the other, I should deserve never to get my head above water again.”

“After all, I don’t see why it should be so inexcusable,” pursued her tormentor. “Though they have not had such a chance as yours, depend upon it, lots of others are after him. He’s a strong, enterprising young man, as you’ve reason to admit. Nobody can deny his good looks, and though he hasn’t a superfluity of brains, he’s always very well dressed.”

“You wouldn’t have said so if you had seen him to-day,” laughed Miss Ross. “My dear, he was almost ready for bathing long before he jumped out of the boat. But seriously,” she resumed with imposing gravity, “I have no secrets from *you*, Rose, and I don’t wish *you*, of all people,

to carry away a false impression of me or my opinions. About Captain Vanguard's good looks I know nothing, for I've never considered them, and as for his being stupid, that I'm sure he's *not*. Decidedly well-read, I should say, from his conversation. However, that's not the question. He has done me a very great service, the greatest, probably, that one human being can do another; for, though I laugh at it now, it seemed no laughing matter, I assure you, while that dreadful whirl of water was filling mouth, and nose, and ears; but if you think I am so missy-ish that I consider it necessary to fall in love with Captain Vanguard because he saved me from drowning, why you never were more mistaken in your life. He's a gentleman, Rose, and a fine fellow, I freely admit. I shall always feel grateful to him, and look on him as a friend, but as for being in *love* with him—bosh! Knowing me as well as you do, Rose, I wonder you can talk such nonsense!"

From all which vehemence, and especially from the gratuitous energy of her friend's

denial, I think Mrs. Lascelles was justified in entertaining a strong impression the very reverse of that which was intended to be conveyed.

Her opinion gained strength from the readiness with which Jin accepted a suggestion that it might be more prudent to remain another day at the villa, instead of returning to London on the morrow, taking into consideration the afternoon's excitement, the hot weather, and the comfort of their present quarters.

"My dear, I should like to stay a month!" exclaimed Miss Ross. "It's a paradise on earth for scenery. Uncle Joseph's the best host in the universe, and we're all so happy. Besides, London is too detestable in this weather. I declare to you, Rose, it was hotter last week than I ever felt it in the South of France."

Mrs. Lascelles pondered, reflecting that she, too, had liked her visit very much. It was pleasant enough to keep her hand in by laying siege to Sir Henry, no great infliction to accept the slavish adoration of Goldthred. If these could be induced to remain, a few days might

pass very agreeably at The Lilies, and Uncle Joseph, of course, would only be too happy to keep them as long as they liked.

“But our London engagements,” said she doubtfully.

“There are none for the next week we need mind throwing over,” replied Jin, whose memory was always to be depended on. “A heavy dinner at Lord Gasper’s—twenty people we don’t know, not a man under forty, and all the windows shut. Mrs. Potterton’s concert—second-rate company, third-rate singers, two hundred people asked and sitting-room for fifty. Lady Jericho’s drum—small and early, like young potatoes; she’ll be mortally affronted, and won’t ask us again; but she’s not going to give anything more this season, so that don’t signify! Dear Rose, it would be very nice. Let us stay.”

Now, in justice to Miss Ross, I feel bound to insist that this sudden hatred of London gaiety and passion for rural scenery was not due solely to her adventure with Frank Vanguard. One of the strongest motives that can sway a woman’s

feelings prompted her to remain in the neighbourhood of Mrs. Mole. To have seen her long-lost child for one short hour, to have held him in her arms, set him on her knees, and folded his curly little head to her bosom, was like a mouthful of water to a man fainting from thirst, delightful, invigorating, life-restoring, but creating an insupportable craving for more.

It may be that this interview had softened Jin's whole moral being, rendering her more susceptible to the gentler emotions of her nature, against which she had long waged unnatural war. It may be that in the subjection of Frank Vanguard she hoped to acquire another vassal, or at least an ally, against the time when she might want to summon all her forces for the furtherance of her plans. Perhaps she had many reasons, perhaps she had none at all, but acted, womanlike, on her instinct and her desires. However this may be, she brought out all her powers of persuasion to fortify her friend in the plan that seemed so delightful, of remaining yet a while longer at The Lilies; but I must leave

to those who understand a woman's nature, if such philosophers there be, the task of explaining why Jin should have felt at this moment less affection, less gratitude to Mrs. Lascelles, and altogether less dependence on her benefactress, than during the whole of their previous acquaintance.

Dinner that day, at least until the champagne had circulated, was less lively than usual. Everybody seemed silent and pre-occupied. Sir Henry, to use his own expression, had not "got out" in time on one of the principal races, and, as the favourite was never "in the hunt," being beaten half-a-mile from home, the baronet experienced a double annoyance, of losing his money, and feeling also that he had been less astute than his neighbours when he suffered Outrigger to carry a large stake for him in the Thames Handicap. Mrs. Lascelles, watching his face narrowly, began to torment herself, but taking her tone from his, these two presently recovered their equanimity. Sir Henry liked champagne, and drank it freely. The exhilarating tendency

of that agreeable wine, acting on the buoyancy of his disposition, soon put dull care to flight, and before dinner was half over, he had forgotten ill-luck, losses, and embarrassments, and disposed himself to grasp the enjoyments of the present as only such natures can.

But not all the wine that ever was corked at Epernay could have enlivened Uncle Joseph after the disclosures of to-day. He hardly spoke to Miss Ross before they sat down; and when she offered him the usual little posy for his button-hole, refused the flowers with a rudeness that would have been brutal, but for the wounded feelings his petulance revealed. Truth compels me to admit that, notwithstanding his mercantile probity, Uncle Joseph scarcely behaved like an honest man in the present transaction. He was not really half so angry as he pretended to be; but remembering, in his previous experience, that such little quarrels often cleared the way to mutual understanding and good-will, he resolved to stick by the precepts of that great amatory authority, "Ovid with the Nose," and prepare,

by a good dose of sulks to-night, for a "*redintegratio amoris*" to-morrow.

Jin, on the contrary, whose present idea it was to keep all her irons in the fire, suffering no profusion of birds in the bush to distract her entirely from the one in hand, proceeded to approach and circumvent her host as craftily as a Scotch keeper stalks an old cock grouse in October. She gazed on him at intervals with mournful curiosity, withdrawing her eyes the instant they met his glance. She sighed, she talked *at* him, she even tried to flirt a little with Goldthred, something in the day's adventures preventing her from sharpening her weapons on Sir Henry; as a last resource, she affected headache and extreme fatigue, while she related, with touching frankness, the accident she had sustained, making light of its danger, and most ungratefully ignoring the gallantry of her preserver.

But all to no purpose—she deceived nobody. Uncle Joseph grew crustier every moment, and Sir Henry, who was easily amused, smiled as he

bethought him that, but for the good looks of the lady, this ill-matched couple reminded him forcibly of a monkey and a bear.

Goldthred, I need hardly observe, was always the same in the presence of his mistress, absent, confused, over-polite, and prone to blush at short notice. At no time did he aspire to be a vivacious companion, but in the company of Mrs. Lascelles he became simply idiotic.

Helen, too, seemed absent and pre-occupied; of course, with the old excuse, that she was over-tired. The weather had been so hot, the road so dusty! and if she *had* indeed expected to meet Captain Vanguard on the Heath, his absence might perhaps have been accounted for more satisfactorily than by the recital of his adventure with Miss Ross, which met her immediately on her return. Dinner, therefore, in spite of the cook's undoubted talents, progressed but heavily, and with long intervals of silence, dispiriting in the extreme.

Later, in the drawing-room, it was worse. A light rain prevented egress on the lawn, intru-

sive cockchafers, buzzing in at the open windows, blundered drowsily about the lights; and—an unusual circumstance—when coffee came, it was not only thick, but cold. The gentlemen were sleepy, or pretended to be; Miss Ross was too tired to sing; and Helen sat by herself, turning over the leaves of a photograph book.

Even Mrs. Lascelles found her animal spirits unequal to the pressure, and, at an earlier hour than usual, made signals to retire for the night.

Standing on the stairs, with a bed-room candle in her hand, she could not forbear expressing to Miss Ross the sense of depression and low spirits under which she laboured.

“If we’re all to be as deadly-lively at Cliefden to-morrow,” said she, “our pic-nic won’t be much fun. I believe I shall follow your example, my dear, and drop quietly into the Thames.”

“To come up again at Cremorne!” replied Jin, yawning drearily. “I’m completely done up, Rose, and tired out. Good night.”

Notwithstanding this protestation, however,

Miss Ross lay awake many a long hour after the other inmates of The Lilies, thinking, wishing, doubting, for the first time in her life mistrusting her own powers, and fearing there was a task before her she would be unequal to perform.

CHAPTER XII.

THE SYREN.

COULD these be the same people, assembled round a white table-cloth, held down at the four corners by judicious pebbles, and covered as yet only with plates and glasses, though hampers, half unpacked, much litter of straw and scatter of paper, denoted that a plentiful feast was in progress of preparation? The ice had not melted, nor were the eggs broken, while even the salt had been remembered by a careful caterer, who bethought him also of borage for the claret-cup, and mint-sauce for the cold lamb. Last night's rain had cooled the air, though scarce a cloud now flecked the calm, blue heaven, and a dazzling sky burnished the Thames into floods of reflected sunshine. Beautiful Cliefden seemed to realise the poet's dream of a very Arcadia, rich in gleams of

light, and deep cool masses of shade, in flicker of leaf, ripple of stream, and song of birds ; bright in the prime of her June loveliness, decked with all her wealth of wood and water, clad in her holiday attire of green and gold.

By the courtesy of one of the kindest and most generous of peers, the party from The Lilies had permission to land and hold their revels in this earthly paradise. Uncle Joseph himself dressing the salad with great pomp and ceremony, vowed "the Duke was a trump of the first water, and if ever he could do him a turn, he would !"

That gipsy Jin had once more coaxed her elderly admirer into perfect good-humour and a return of entire confidence in herself. This desirable reconciliation was effected by the frankness with which she asked to sit by his side on the voyage hither, a distinction he was too angry to offer, and a position indeed of no slight constraint and inconvenience, inasmuch as he insisted on steering the boat, occupying for that purpose a scanty perch, as little adapted to his

proportions as would have been the five-pound saddle in which a slim subaltern or undergraduate rides a hurdle-race.

Here, like "lissome Vivien" twining herself about her Merlin's feet, she coaxed him into good humour in ten minutes. Perhaps yesterday's practice on the river had served to keep her hand in. No sooner were they fairly under weigh, and the attention of the others distracted by a passing barge, than she nestled to his side, crossed two taper forefingers under his nose, and looking up in his face with a glance that mingled affection and reproach in deadliest proportions, murmured the single monosyllable, "Why?"

Uncle Joseph, neglecting his rudder, melted visibly. All the oars on stroke side touched ground at once, and No. 2 caught a crab. Still he did not choose to surrender over-hastily, and pulling hard at his tiller-ropes, replied in a hoarse whisper—

"Miss Ross, you know your own business best, but I don't think you treat me quite on the square."

“*Miss Ross!*” she repeated, and again those black reproachful eyes would have pierced a rhinoceros, crackling and all. “I thought you were never to call me by that hateful name again. I’m always to be ‘Jin.’ Always, even when you’re angry with me. And to tell you the truth, I shouldn’t have liked you *not* to mind about what I did yesterday, though indeed it wasn’t my fault.”

“Now, then, look ahead!” For a minute or two Uncle Joseph could think of nothing but an Eton eight flashing down stream at the rate of twelve miles an hour, threatening to cut him in two from stem to stern unless he got out of the way. Not till this water-dragon was half a mile off did he recover composure to put the pertinent question, “When you went out yesterday, did you expect to meet Captain Vanguard on the river?”

“You *know* I didn’t,” exclaimed Jin; “it’s cruel to ask me!” Then out came a long story, well-conceived, deftly constructed, and told with such downcast glances, in such low pleading

murmurs, with such pretty little flashes of pique, and shades of penitence, and sparkles of fun, all repressed and toned down not to be overheard, that, had the success of their voyage depended on the steersman, I fear boat and crew and passengers might have come to disastrous shipwreck at least a dozen times between Maidenhead-reach and Cliefden landing-place.

But Jin at any rate succeeded in gaining a temporary haven, and dropped her anchors to-day in Uncle Joseph's breast with a sense of triumph that such moorings never afforded her before.

Mrs. Lascelles meanwhile had taken possession of Sir Henry, leaving Miss Hallaton to the enforced attentions of Goldthred. Helen, I believe, in her heart would have given a good deal to change places with "bow,"—a sturdy knave, brawny, deep-chested, and curly as a retriever; nor was she incapable of handling an oar for a short distance almost as effectually as that skilled waterman. It would have been at least a relief from her companion, whose politeness neverthe-

less was unimpeachable as his conversation was correct and monotonous in the extreme.

Such a dialogue as the following would have excited her mirth, but that Helen just now seemed to have lost all sense of the ludicrous, with her spirits, energy, and general interest in life:—

“Don’t you enjoy the water on a day like this, Miss Hallaton?”

“Immensely.”

“There seems no chance of rain at present. I think the fine weather will last us now till the moon changes.”

“Probably.”

“That’s a great advantage, you know, for the people who have already got their hay down.”

“Undoubtedly.”

“How smooth the boat goes, Miss Hallaton. A smooth row is—is—much smoother, isn’t it, and pleasanter, than a rough one?”

“Certainly.”

“And this is a very nice row, I think,” continued Goldthred, encouraged by an approving

glance from Mrs. Lascelles, to whom his eyes, like his thoughts, were continually turned,—which accounted, indeed, for the abnormal idiocy of his conversation. “I shall be almost sorry when we get to Cliefden; shan’t you?”

“Oh, no!” exclaimed Helen, truthfully enough, but with a fervency that startled herself, and caused her companion to retire from any further attempts at small talk in confusion and dismay.

Sir Henry caught his daughter’s eye, and could not help laughing. Perhaps, much as he loved her, the only feeling of his child in which he could thoroughly sympathise, was a certain susceptibility, inherited from himself, of being bored, and a tendency to adopt the ridiculous view even of so distressing a calamity.

He felt for her at present all the more that his own position was perfectly to his taste—smoking an excellent cigar, propped by soft cushions, with the summer sky above, the lap and wash of the cool water around, pleasant company, a good luncheon in prospect, and a pretty woman, half in

love with him, shading his face with her parasol, while her soft tones murmured in his ear. Sir Henry did not care how long the voyage lasted, though prepared to accept its conclusion with the greater resignation, that their party was to be reinforced at Cliefden by a few agreeable acquaintances eking out the end of a gay Ascot week, and a sprinkling of young officers from Windsor.

The latter addition was a bright thought of Mrs. Lascelles, who, being thoroughly good-natured, intended it especially for Helen's gratification. But, as she had no time to receive answers to her notes of invitation before starting, and, like most women, imagined military duties ceaseless and unvarying, she said nothing about the warlike element for fear it should be unattainable, forbearing to raise the young lady's hopes only that they might be destroyed. "I didn't like being disappointed myself when I was a girl," thought Mrs. Lascelles. "I'm not sure I like it a bit better now."

She was getting very fond of Helen, believed

in her goodness, admitted her beauty, and was, perhaps, the only person in the world who thought her the image of her father.

In all matters of affection Mrs. Lascelles was clear-sighted enough, and it did not escape her that Helen's spirits, during the last day or two, had sunk lower than was natural at her time of life under no more sedative influences than sunshine and dust. It was partly to rouse the girl from her depression, as well as for purposes of her own, that she commanded Goldthred to place himself at Miss Hallaton's disposal; but certain suspicions that the young lady required a more warlike vassal than this obedient slave, were much strengthened by the light that sparkled in her eyes when, nearing Cliefden, a group of gentlemen became visible on the landing-place, in the midst of whom she could not mistake the shapely form of Frank Vanguard.

Mrs. Lascelles, you see, had a good afternoon's work on hand. A score of people to entertain, couples to pair, flirtations to encourage, and Jin's vagaries to overlook, lest she should drive Uncle

Joseph beyond the bounds of patience ; besides keeping Sir Henry at her own apron-string, while enacting the part of a blue-eyed Cleopatra to that laziest and least warlike of Antonys.

Half-a-dozen swinging, vigorous jerks, an exclamation of pleasure from the passengers, an "easy all!" in gruff syllables from "Stroke," and the galley poised her oars, as a sea-bird spreads her pinions, ere she folds them to alight. The officers cheered, the ladies chattered, greetings were exchanged, muslins shaken out, parasols unfurled—a cool air stole across the water, a black-bird struck up from the copse, the leaves danced, the boat danced, the sunshine danced, the scene was all colour, motion, and variety, like a ballet after Watteau, set to music by Offenbach.

In these days it is the affectation of society to be natural, and nobody can dispute the advantage of such a change from that pompous reserve and frozen insensibility which represented good-breeding some five-and-twenty years ago. The party gathered round their table-cloth on the grass at

Cliefden, if more polished, were as joyous and merry as so many lads and lasses at a fair. Of course it took some little time before luncheon could be got ready, of course it was necessary to walk about during the interval, of course people paired off for that purpose. Nobody goes to a pic-nic, I imagine, with the view of discussing grave subjects in full conclave—forbid it! faun and satyr, nymph and dryad, forest-fairy and bottle-imp, the genius of the woodland, the goblin of the cave, all the spirits of the hamper, the corkscrew, and the rill!

No; for us seniors, let there be flowing cups, though temperate, cooled with ice, and spiced with fragrant herbs—a cunning pasty, a piece of resistance, thus named because irresistible, egg-sandwiches, French mustard, a currant-tart, and a parti-coloured *mayonnaise*. So shall we flavour the repast with quip and jest, with merry, quaint conceit and pointed anecdote, pleasant or pathetic, yet, in pity, not too long! But, as for you young people, off with you, while we uncork the wine! Climb the bank, if you know it, “whereon the

wild-thyme grows ;” dive into the recesses of the forest, its paths are only wide enough for two ;

“Look in the lily-bell, ruffle the rose,
Under the leaves of the violet peep.”

Reflect how pleasant it is to gather strawberries with a *Mademoiselle Thérèse* in the wood of *Malieu*.

“Quand on est deux,
Quand on est deux,”

make the most of your golden hour, but come back again ere you have kept your elders waiting too long for luncheon, ere you yourselves have said or done anything that shall cause a moment's regret in the reaction that comes after happiness, as surely as darkness follows day.

Uncle Joseph, I have said, was preparing the salad, therefore Miss Ross found herself at liberty to indulge in such devilries as were consistent with the Satanic element in her nature. It was not likely she would abstain from a shot or two at Frank Vanguard, if only to “get the range,” as it were, of her batteries previous to real work. She accosted him with exactly the right mixture of diffidence and interest, held his hand for just

one second more than enough; and even contrived to raise a blush on her pale face, while, meeting his eyes very shyly, she whispered, in answer to his inquiries—"I haven't caught cold, and I'm none the worse, and certainly none the better! And I shouldn't at all mind undertaking the whole expedition over again."

Why wasn't it Helen? Again, through growing interest and gratified vanity, rose almost unconsciously that wistful thought; but Helen saw it all, and bit her lip, looking very cold and pale, whilst she turned from his greeting with a distant bow, beseeching Mr. Goldthred, whom, it now occurred to her, she had treated with less than civility, to gather her a water-lily floating near the bank, and so detaching him from the others, unintentionally constituted him her "pair." These things are soon done, you see, when people pounce for partners, as if they were playing puss-in-the-corner, and nobody wants to be "left out in the cold."

The moments were very precious, and would have passed even more quickly than they did,

but that the couples were all hungry, and quite as ready for luncheon as love-making. Sir Henry, indeed, absolutely refused to move a step from the shady nook in which he had ensconced himself, and Mrs. Lascelles made her position as hostess an excuse for not accompanying a beardless subaltern in a climb after ferns up a perpendicular bank, feathered to the top with those graceful exotics of the forest. This enterprising youth, not yet dismissed the riding-school, thought it incumbent on him to place his cheerful society at her disposal, whom he irreverently designated "the loudest swell of the lot;" but seemed relieved, nevertheless, by her refusal of his attentions, and subsided with extreme goodwill into his cornet-a-piston—an instrument on which he played sundry negro melodies with great enjoyment and no contemptible execution.

It had been agreed that, directly luncheon was ready, he should summon the stragglers by performing a popular air called "The Roast-beef of Old England," into which, as he threatened, he threw his whole mind, embroidering it with

masterly variations founded on a "call," well-known in barracks as the solemn warning—

"You'll lose your beef and pudding, my boys,
You'll lose your beef and pud—ding."

Goldthred had only wetted one sleeve to the shoulder, and thrust the corresponding foot ankle-deep in mud, while fishing water-lilies for Miss Hallaton, ere these welcome sounds released him from attendance, and he brought her back in triumph—looking to Mrs. Lascelles, as little Jack Horner might, from the corner in which he boasted, "What a good boy am I!" She rewarded him as you reward a retriever, if not too wet, by giving him her shawl to take care of.

Uncle Joseph, too, had been so engrossed with the salad, that Miss Ross was at his elbow again almost before he missed her, though, short as had been her absence, I cannot doubt she made the best use of her time.

Much may be done, if I remember right, in a few minutes, when paths are steep as well as narrow, when glades are deep and dark even under a midsummer sun, when two people are

inclined, if only for pastime, to engage in that game from which a loser so often rises under the impression that he has won.

It was the old story—Miss Ross, with all her craft, was playing stakes she could ill afford. In the attachments, as in other relations of life, wise is that aphorism of the canny Scot, “Reach not out your hand farther than you can draw it back again.” Ere she rejoined the others, Jin felt she must win at any sacrifice : she could not get her hand back now ; she would not if she could.

Frank, sitting down to cut open a pigeon pie, felt half-pleased, half-penitent. Like a child being tickled, he was inclined both to laugh and to resist.

He looked remorsefully across the table-cloth at Miss Hallaton, but that perverse young woman, obstinately avoiding his glance, persisted in being amused by the cornet-player’s buffooneries, wishing drearily all the while that she had never come. Frank thought he too could be indifferent ; so the breach widened,

from the breadth of the table-cloth to a gulf that could only be bridged over by loving memories and painful thoughts, as the lake is spanned by the rainbow, that owes its very existence to a shower of Nature's tears.

Undoubtedly there is a deal of self-love mixed up with these tender woes and joys. If vanity constitutes much of their pleasure, surely it produces more than half their pain. "*Plus aloes quam mellis habet,*" says the Roman satirist; and perhaps, after all, the honey would be very insipid without the sting.

But a pic-nic is no place for indulgence or regret. The party had landed at Cliefden for enjoyment, and were determined to grasp the shadow of happiness if not the substance thereof. So corks flew and tongues wagged merrily, the cold lamb waned, the *mayonnaise* disappeared, the currant tart bled freely.

"And when the pie was opened, the birds began to sing," so, at least, said the young subaltern, now in a state of exceedingly high spirits; "and why shouldn't the ladies?" he

added, looking round him with condescending affability. "I'll accompany any or all of them to any tune or in any direction she pleases. Though I'm humble, I'm industrious; and if I seem too weak for the place, you must suit yourselves 'elsewheres;' for, to do man's work, I must have man's wages, and I ain't half so soft as I look!"

"You're a very impudent boy," said Mrs. Lascelles, laughing; "but you're rather good fun, and it's not a bad suggestion. Now, who will give us a song?"

There seemed rather a lack of volunteers. The original proposer vowed he could neither drink nor sing unless after a lady. He was shy, he said, and blushed under his skin, therefore nobody gave him credit for modesty. Helen felt something in her throat that warned her she must burst out crying, unless she kept it down. One had a cold, others could not remember any words, so it soon came round to Miss Ross, "who was always so good-natured; everybody was sure she wouldn't disappoint them!"

Jin never made any fuss about her singing.

“What shall it be?” she asked Uncle Joseph, who never knew one tune from another, but vastly enjoyed the proprietorship inferred by such an appeal.

“Oh, that pretty air from the—the——Well, you know the one I mean; or, or—anything you please, dear Miss Ross; they’re all charming.” And Uncle Joseph passed his cigar-case round, with the look of a man who had acquitted himself handsomely of a difficult and delicate task.

“I’ll sing you a new one I got the other day,” said Jin, flashing another of her dangerous glances through the smoke that was curling round Frank Vanguard’s comely face. “It’s called, ‘Yes—I like you,’ and there’s *a moral* in it. Thanks! It does best without an accompaniment,” and, looking very bewitching as she pushed her hair back, she began:—

“YES—I LIKE YOU.”

When I meet you, can I greet you
With a haughty little stare?
Scarcely glancing, where you’re prancing,
By me on the chestnut mare.

Still dissembling, though I'm trembling,
 Thus you know we're trained and taught.
 For I like you, doesn't it strike you?
 Like you more than p'raps I ought!
 Yes—I like you, doesn't it strike you?
 Like you more than p'raps I ought!

When I meet you, must I treat you
 As a stranger, calm and cold,
 Softer feeling, half revealing,—
 Are you *waiting* to be told?
 D' you suppose, sir, that a rose, sir,
 Picks *itself* to reach your breast?
 And I like you, doesn't it strike you?
 Like you more than all the rest.
 Yes—I like you, &c.

When I meet you, I could eat you,
 Dining with my Uncle John;
 Sitting next you, so perplexed, you
 Ought to guess my heart is gone.
 While I'm choking, 'tis provoking
 You can munch, and talk, and drink,
 Though I like you, doesn't it strike you?
 Like you more than you may think!
 Yes—I like you, &c.

When I meet you, I could beat you,
 For your solemn face and glum.
 Don't you see, sir, *you* are free, sir,
 I have all the worst to come!
 Mother's warning, sisters' scorning—
 Qualms of prudence, pride and pelf.
 Oh! I like you—doesn't it strike you?
 Like you more than life itself!
 Yes—I like you, &c.

There was no mistaking the hint conveyed in this touching ditty ; but whether he accepted it or not, the song was hardly concluded ere Frank took leave of the company. Certain regimental duties, he said, looking hard at Helen, required his presence in barracks, and therefore he had come on horseback, so as to return at his own time. He regretted it extremely, of course. He had spent a delightful day, and could not thank his entertainers enough. This civil little speech he addressed indeed to Uncle Joseph and Mrs. Lascelles, but his eyes sought Miss Hallaton's the while, and their imploring expression cut her to the heart.

There is a code of signals in use amongst young people situated as these were, far more intelligible than that employed by her Majesty's Navy or the Royal Yacht Squadron. They never shook hands, they exchanged no good-bye, but Helen hoisted something in reply to his flag of distress that appeared perfectly satisfactory to both. Though Miss Ross looked longingly after him as he went away, Frank never turned to

meet her glance ; and Helen, thoroughly enjoying the homeward trip at sunset, seemed in better spirits and more like herself than she had been all day.

Mrs. Lascelles was puzzled. She had missed the exchange of signals, and could not make it out.

CHAPTER XIII.

SUNDAY IN LONDON.

THERE is a late train from Maidenhead to Paddington that always reminds me of Charon's bark chartered to carry deceased passengers across the Styx. It seems, like that fatal ferry-boat, to fix a limit between two separate stages of existence,—the river, the flowers, the cup, the pleasant friends, the tender well-wisher, in short, "the bright precincts of the cheerful day," and that dark region, forbidding though unavoidable, where we meet our fellow-creatures on more equal, more practical, more distant, and more uncomfortable terms.

Goldthred, who was obliged to be in London the same night, sank into the lowest depths of despondency while bidding adieu to Mrs.

Lascelles and her party, as they embarked under a purple sunset for their homeward voyage. He felt sadly alone in the world, even at the station, and getting into a vast and gloomy compartment, of which he was sole occupant, under a dim lamp, began to reflect seriously on life and its vexations. His cigars were done, his boots were wet, he suffered from head-ache, heart-ache, and premonitory symptoms of a dreadful disorder called the fidgets. Had he only known that Frank Vanguard, who got in at Slough, was in the very next carriage, how gladly would he have communicated with that migratory young officer, by knocking, shouting, or any other riotous mode of attracting attention; but, for aught he could tell, there was no passenger in the train but himself, and the sense of solitude became nearly insupportable. Passing Hanwell, he found himself envying the unfortunate inmates their varied society, and the liveliness of their manners. Goaded at last by his reflections, and summoning that most daring of all courage which is

furnished by despair, he resolved to turn over a new leaf, to assert himself and his own value, to push the siege briskly, and asking Mrs. Lascelles an important question point-blank, stand or fall by her answer like a man. *Se faire valoir*, he well knew, was the winning game; but, alas! the more precious the heart the lower the price it seems to place on itself, and Goldthred, with all his short-comings, possessed in his character a vein of the true metal, which makes men honest servants if not successful masters. Taking counsel, then, of his very fears, he determined to open the trenches by organising another pic-nic, somewhere lower down the river, to which he would invite all the party of to-day, and such other additions from London as he considered worthy of the honour. Miss Hallaton, of course. Nice girl, Miss Hallaton, and civil to *him*! Distant, but that was manner. Ah! she would make a charming wife to a fellow who admired that kind of beauty. It was not *his* style, of course; and with this reflection, the image of a lovely

laughing face, and a pair of kind blue eyes, seemed to brighten even the gloom of his dismal railway carriage.

Thinking of Mrs. Lascelles somehow called Sir Henry unpleasantly to mind. And he bethought him how that easy-going personage had expressed certain vague intentions of starting on an expedition of his own, to see some yearlings, leaving his daughter at The Lilies. "Then I'll write to Miss Hallaton herself," thought Goldthred. "Why shouldn't I? That will prevent the possibility of a mistake, and perhaps Mrs. Lascelles won't quite like it. I wonder if she would care. I *couldn't* make her unhappy, the angel, to save my life, but I wish I was sure I had the power."

By the time he reached Paddington, Goldthred's spirits had risen considerably, as is usually the case with a man who has resolved to take his own part; and, after extricating an overblown rose from his button-hole, and planting it carefully in the neck of his water-bottle, he went to bed, feeling keenly that the time was

fast approaching to decide his fate, and that the next week, or say, perhaps, ten days, must settle his business and make him "a man or a mouse."

In pursuance of this desperate resolution he rose the following morning in time for church, and betook himself after service to his usual Sunday resort, the Cauliflower Club. Here, seated at a desert of writing-table, in a vast and dismal library, he had an opportunity of comparing the gloom that reigned within and without this sanctuary of his sex. Foreigners can seldom recall unmoved the memories of a Sunday in London. Whether it is because the shops are shut, or the streets unwatered, or the upper classes invisible, I know not, but certainly on that holy day of rest and rejoicing, our bustling metropolis looks grim and deserted as a city of the dead. Doubtless, everybody goes out of town that can. Those who remain, thinking it, I presume, either eccentric or wicked to be seen abroad, hide themselves with extraordinary caution and success. The same

dulness seems to pervade all parts of the town, except, perhaps, those very poor districts in which vice and want allow their vassals no change, no relaxation from the daily round of dirt, discomfort, and sin. You may traverse Tyburnia and scarce meet a human creature. Belgrave Square is sombre and noiseless as the catacombs. A single Hansom represents traffic, vitality, and commercial prosperity throughout Mayfair, Piccadilly, and St. James's Street. Go into Hyde Park, you will observe one solitary soldier, and his inevitable maid-servant, carrying her prayer-book wrapped in a cotton pocket-handkerchief. Search Kensington Gardens, you will find that beautiful woodland occupied by a sleeping ragamuffin, a child with its sister, and a wandering female of weak intellect. From Brompton to Billingsgate, from Mary-le-bone to the Minories, you will discover as few passengers as you would see flies on a pane of glass at Christmas. What becomes of the winter blue-bottles I do not pretend to say, but of the two-legged insects pervading our earth, I imagine

that on Sundays the males retire, like Goldthred, in countless swarms to their clubs. Nevertheless, while he wrote the invitations, particularly Miss Hallaton's, with exceeding care and a hard-nibbed pen, he found himself the only occupant but one of the magnificent apartment, devoted to literary labour by a judicious committee presiding over the economy of the Cauliflower. Of the student thus sharing his solitude, and who might or might not be an intimate acquaintance, nothing was visible but the back of a curly brown head, as its wearer lay buried in an enormous sofa, reading, or more probably, asleep. Club-manners, except in certain professional circles where members are bound by their trade in a common brotherhood, forbidding such outrages, Goldthred, even had he been inclined, must have forborne from hurling books across the room, stealing behind to flirt ink on his face, or adopting other such playful modes of attracting notice, and assuring himself of the gentleman's identity, so he continued to write with precision and perseverance, leaving the room

when he had finished, without discovering that its other occupant was Frank Vanguard.

The two men were scarcely twenty feet apart, they could have assisted each other considerably in their respective objects, they were thinking at the same moment of the same person, yet for all practical purposes they might as well have been in different counties.

Frank was not asleep—far from it; neither was he reading, though wrapped in a train of thought produced by a novel he had been perusing with unusual avidity and attention. His duties at the barracks had detained him all the previous evening, and catching the last train, not without difficulty, he succeeded in spending his Sunday in London, to find himself with nothing to do when he got there. Truth to tell, Frank was unsettled and unlike himself. He breakfasted without appetite at his cheerful little bachelor lodgings, which were always kept ready, even when the regiment was in London, and in which he slept perhaps half a dozen times in a month. He dressed in unseemly haste, he sallied out tumult-

uously, with no definite object, and took refuge at last in the library of the Cauliflower, from sheer weariness of body and vacuity of mind. He was so unaccustomed to weigh matters seriously, as affecting the course of a whole lifetime, so unused to reflection on anything less obvious than the front of a squadron or the speed of a horse, that he felt really oppressed by the great argument going on in his own mind, as to whether he could, or could not, struggle through existence without asking Miss Hallaton to be his wife.

Young gentlemen of the present day are not an uxorious race, and Frank was like his fellows. He appreciated, nobody more, the liberty of a single man, and had imbibed from his elders, by precept, example, and warning, a certain dread of the restraints and monotony that must accompany married life. But then, to sit opposite such a woman as Helen every morning at breakfast, to have her all to himself, without scheming for invitations, and watching for carriages; without necessity for being civil to a chaperone, or

making up to a father, why it seemed a heaven upon earth, to attain which he would—yes, hang him if he wouldn't—give up even the regiment itself!

Such being the frame of mind in which he sat down to read his novel, it was but natural that the progress of his studies should have confirmed any previous tendency to sentiment and domestic subjugation. This eloquent work, in three volumes, purporting to furnish a picture of real life, painted up a little, but not overdrawn, represented, of course, an impossible heroine, a combination of circumstances that never could have taken place, and a *jeune premier* beautiful as Endymion; nor, judging from his vagaries, apparently much less under the influence of the moon. To use Frank's own expression, the scene that "fetched him," somewhere about the middle of the third volume, ran as follows:—

"A sunset of the tropics, or of paradise, crimson, orange, gold, the plumage of the flamingo, the tints of the dying dolphin, were all reflected in the deep pure eyes of that fair girl, as she leaned

one snowy arm on the balustrade, and peered out over the lake, herself radiant as the sunset, loving as the flamingo, stern and resolved as the dolphin in his death-pangs. 'He cometh not,' she muttered, 'he cometh not!' and her fairy fingers, closing on the parapet, broke off a morsel of the stonework with the grip and energy of a blacksmith. It fell with a splash in the lake. Could this be the expected signal? Was that important splash but the result of blind accident? Nay, was it not rather the summons of a relentless Fate? Ere the circles that it made in the limpid element had wholly disappeared, a boat was heard to grate upon the shingle beneath the castle. A cloaked figure stood in the prow, masked, booted, belted, and armed to the teeth. But when was true love yet deceived by belts, boots, masks, or pistols? 'Tis he!' she exclaimed, 'tis he!' and in another moment Lady Clara was in Roland's arms, sailing, sailing on towards the sunset, never to part on earth, never to part perhaps in——"

"Quite right too!" said Frank, closing the

book with a bang. "Good fellow! plucky girl! I'll be hanged if I won't have a shy! She can but say 'No.' And if worst comes to worst, there's always the other to fall back upon!"

So with this exceedingly disloyal and uncomplimentary adaptation of Miss Ross as a *pis-aller*, Frank sat himself down at the table lately occupied by Goldthred, to concoct a letter in which, with as little circumlocution as possible, he should ask Miss Hallaton to be his wife.

Much mutual surprise was expressed by these two gentlemen, when, meeting an hour later in Pall Mall, they discovered that they had been fellow-travellers the night before, each in his own mind having envied the good fortune of the other in remaining at Windsor. With such a topic as their past pic-nic to discuss, and a certain indefinable instinct that they had some mysterious interests in common, they soon merged out of mere acquaintance into friendship, or that which the world calls friendship—an alliance for mutual support and convenience, originating in discreet regard for self. Further to cement this bond of

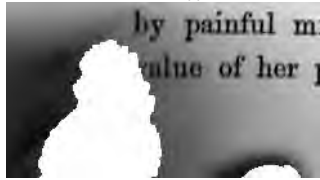
brotherhood, they dined together solemnly at their club, and parted heartily tired of each other before eleven o'clock, going straight to bed, I verily believe, in sheer despair. And thus it was that these unfortunates, ardent lovers in their way, spent their Sunday in London.

CHAPTER XIV.

POST-TIME.

SUNDAY at The Lilies was far pleasanter to everybody concerned. Indeed, notwithstanding the proverbial dulness of the day that succeeds a festival, the female inmates of that charming little retreat were more inclined to be frolicsome than usual. Their hilarity might partly be accounted for by that principle of contradiction which prompts us all to merriment on such occasions as demand unusual sobriety of demeanour. You will observe children invariably predisposed to a romp on Sunday morning. I think also that each lady had reason to be satisfied in reviewing her afternoon's work of the day before. Mrs. Lascelles, if she did not succeed in adding one single brick to the superstructure of her

... .. at least, on
 and that Sir Henry
 though she
 in process of softening
 and perceptible only
 Mrs. Low had sundry topics for
 leading to self-conviction. With
 what we may call her "bird-in-
 the-bush" she had effected a thorough recon-
 ciliation. She could perceive, by the unusual
 splendour of his Sunday plumage, that he was
 more than ever enamoured with his captivity,
 and meditated at no distant period, some decided
 effort to render it irrevocable. She felt confi-
 dence enough in her own tact to be sure she
 could postpone such a catastrophe till it suited
 her convenience to bring it about, and this delay,
 • she decided, should depend entirely on her progress
 in bagging her "bird-in-the-bush." That Frank
 Vanguard was hit severely, and "under the
 wing," she did not doubt, nor, though visited
 by painful misgivings, while she dwelt on the
 value of her prey, was she without strong hopes



that by watching a timely opportunity, and making a brilliant "snap-shot," she might prove too quick for her rival, and pull him down like "a rocketeer" over Miss Hallaton's head. This was a pleasant dream for the future. She had, besides, a keen enjoyment to look forward to in the immediate present. She was about to see her boy—that alone would be happiness enough for a week! Nothing could be easier than to steal away, as if for afternoon church, and speed to Mrs. Mole's. From that garrulous old woman, too, she hoped to learn something definite about Achille. Why he was in England? what were his relations with the child? whether—and her heart bounded at the thought—it might not be possible, through the agency of this humble old peasant-woman, to obtain uncontrolled possession of her treasure? For such an object she felt she would willingly forego the patronage of Mrs. Lascelles, the vassalage of Uncle Joseph, home, position, prospects! Even Frank Vanguard himself? On

the last point she could not quite make up her mind, so left it for future consideration.

With all these interests and occupations, Jin had yet found time to knit a tiny pair of socks for her Gustave. Tears filled her eyes while she pictured the delight of fitting them to his chubby little feet, that very afternoon as he sat on her knee. Though she had many faults she was yet a mother, and in mothers, even the most depraved, a well-spring of natural affection is to be found as surely as milk in a cow.

Helen, too, returning radiant from morning church, looked, to use Sir Henry's expression, "seven pound better" than the day before. Something seemed to have infused fresh vitality into the girl's existence; but of Helen's sentiments I cannot take upon me to furnish an analysis. In the pure unsullied heart of a young and loving woman there are depths it is desecration to fathom, feelings it is impossible to describe, and it would be sacrilege to caricature. None are so thoroughly aware of this as those who know what the bad can be in that sex, of

which the good are so excellent. Well for him, whose experience has lain amongst these last, and who goes to his grave with trust unshaken in the most elevating of earthly creeds—a belief in woman's love and woman's truth—whose worship of her outward beauty is founded on implicit confidence in the purity and fidelity of her heart! Such privileged spirits walk lightly over the troubles of their journey through life, as if they were indeed borne up by angels, "lest at any time they dash their foot against a stone."

Sunday luncheon, then, at The Lilies was a pleasant and sociable meal enough. Mrs. Lascelles, though surprised to find she *did* miss Goldthred a little, seemed in exuberant spirits, perhaps for that very reason. The rest took their tone from her whom they considered their hostess, and the repast, which differed only from dinner in the absence of soup and fish, being excellent and elaborate, no wonder everybody was in high good humour, and more disposed to talk than to listen.

The conversation at first turned upon yester-

day's doings, and it is not to be supposed that the dress, manners, looks, character, and presumptive age of every other woman at the picnic escaped comment, criticism, or final condemnation. Sir Henry, indeed, true to his traditions, made a gallant stand in favour of one lady, the youngest of the party, "a miss in her teens," as she was contemptuously designated by his listeners, but found himself coughed down with great severity and contempt. He couldn't mean that odious girl in green ribbons! She was forward—she was noisy—she had freckles—she romped with Captain Roe—she flirted with Mr. Driver—she was ugly, unladylike, bad style. Even Helen wondered quietly, "What papa could see in her? Though, to be sure, he always admired red hair!"

Their friends thus summarily disposed of, with the first course, they began talking about what they called "their plans." It seemed there was to be an unavoidable break up on the morrow, mitigated, however, by faithful promises from the absentees to return before the end of the week.

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one snowy arm on the balustrade, and peered out over the lake, herself radiant as the sunset, loving as the flamingo, stern and resolved as the dolphin in his death-pangs. 'He cometh not,' she muttered, 'he cometh not!' and her fairy fingers, closing on the parapet, broke off a morsel of the stonework with the grip and energy of a blacksmith. It fell with a splash in the lake. Could this be the expected signal? Was that important splash but the result of blind accident? Nay, was it not rather the summons of a relentless Fate? Ere the circles that it made in the limpid element had wholly disappeared, a boat was heard to grate upon the shingle beneath the castle. A cloaked figure stood in the prow, masked, booted, belted, and armed to the teeth. But when was true love yet deceived by belts, boots, masks, or pistols? "'Tis he!' she exclaimed, "'tis he!' and in another moment Lady Clara was in Roland's arms, sailing, sailing on towards the sunset, never to part on earth, never to part perhaps in——"

"Quite right too!" said Frank, closing the

“I won’t ask you to stay here and lose your ball to-morrow night,” said Uncle Joseph, filling Helen’s glass, with the kindly, half-protective air affected by an elderly gentleman towards a young lady when he is not fool enough to be in love with her. “I know what these things are at your time of life, my dear. I used to like them myself, and danced, too, I can tell you! We danced much harder in my day. But why shouldn’t you come back on Tuesday or Wednesday? See now, I’ll arrange it all. You’re obliged to go to London to-morrow, you said, Rose, didn’t you?”

“No help for it!” Mrs. Lascelles admitted. “I shall take my maid, sleep at No. 40, and come down again next day.”

“Then why shouldn’t you take care of Miss Hallaton, and bring her back with you?”

“Delightful!” assented his kinswoman. “And she can sleep at my house. It’s the next street to Lady Shuttlecock’s, and Helen’s chaperon can drop her there after the ball. Sir Henry, will you trust her with *me*?”

Helen looked from Mrs. Lascelles to her father; the latter gave a joyful affirmative.

“It will save me a fifty-miles journey,” said he. “Helen goes to the ball with her aunt, and if you bring her down again, I needn’t travel all the way to London to fetch her.”

“But are you quite sure I shall not be troublesome?” asked Helen meekly, willing enough, however, to accept any arrangement that should facilitate her attendance at a ball she seemed very loth to miss.

“Troublesome! my dear,” repeated Mrs. Lascelles. “You don’t know what a pleasure it is to have you! I quite look forward to showing you my pretty little house; and you shall sleep in Jin’s room—unless you’re coming too?” she added, turning to Miss Ross.

The latter, glancing at Uncle Joseph, who tried hard to look unconcerned, declined, with a bright smile. “She had nothing to tempt her in London,” she said, “unless she could be of use to Rose. She would much rather stay in the pleasant country, and—and take care of Mr. Groves!”

Uncle Joseph coloured with delight, and Jin felt that the cards were all playing themselves into her hand. It was even possible that Frank Vanguard might call to-morrow or the next day, whilst Helen was in London. She was sure of one, if not two, interviews with her child. Lastly, she would have a golden opportunity of showing Uncle Joseph how pleasant she could make his house while entertaining himself and his friends.

“You’ll come back to dinner now, Hallaton,” said the host, “as you’re not due in town? I’ve asked one or two neighbours and their wives. What’s more to the purpose, there’s a haunch of venison.”

Even that gastronomic temptation, however, was insufficient to affix certainty to any of Sir Henry’s movements. “He was going to see some yearlings sold,” he said—“the trains were all at variance. He should hope to get back the same day, but hadn’t an idea whether he could. Helen, who understood ‘Bradshaw,’ said *not*. All he knew was, he had to meet Mr. Weights,

the trainer, at Ascot to-morrow at ten. He should be obliged to get up in the middle of the night!"

"*Must* you go so early?" asked Mrs. Lascelles, with a sympathising smile.

"No help for it," answered Sir Henry resignedly. "Shall have to breakfast at nine. Such is life!"

So Mrs. Lascelles managed to rise early the following morning, and come down to pour out Sir Henry's coffee, looking exceedingly fresh and handsome the while; but it is probable she might have saved herself the trouble, and enjoyed at least two hours' more beauty-sleep, had she foreseen that Helen would also be in the breakfast-room to keep papa company, as was her custom during his morning meal.

So Sir Henry, after an exceedingly hasty repast, started off, with a cigar in his mouth, of course, for the congenial society of a trainer, and the delightful occupation of looking at untried thorough-bred stock that he could not afford to buy, leaving the ladies to such devices of their

own as might while away their morning till the welcome hour of post-time.

“Letters! letters!” exclaimed Jin, who always took upon herself to superintend its arrival, departure, and, indeed, all arrangements connected with the correspondence at The Lilies; “two for Helen, one for Rose, one for me, and five for Mr. Groves,”—while she dealt from a packet in her hand these several missives to their respective owners, each of whom received the boon with gratitude, except Uncle Joseph.

Women, I believe, always like to get letters. To their craving dispositions, I imagine bad news is better than none; and they prefer the excitement of sorrow to the stagnation of no excitement at all. Even towards Christmas, when the majority of written communications tend to disturb our enjoyment of the season, only from male lips is heard the fervent thanksgiving, “No letters? What a blessing!” The ladies, I am persuaded, would rather receive reminders from their dressmakers, than feel themselves cut off from all interest in the daily mail.

Uncle Joseph, who expected but little gratification from his epistles, and under the most favourable conditions reflected they would mostly require answers, retired with a growl to peruse them in his own den. Where we may leave him to their full enjoyment, preferring to remain in the bright and cheerful morning-room with the ladies.

Miss Ross read her letter with a smile of considerable amusement, and a mischievous glance at Mrs. Lascelles.

“From Goldie,” said she, “and tolerably coherent, considering the poor thing’s state of mind. Do you hear, Rose? I have actually got a letter from *your* Mr. Goldthred!”

“So have I,” said Mrs. Lascelles quietly.

“So have I,” echoed Helen; “I had no idea he wrote so nice a hand.”

Comparing their several communications, the three ladies discovered that this painstaking correspondent had written in precisely the same terms to each, requesting, with no little formality, the pleasure of their company at his proposed

pic-nic. To so polite a circular all admitted it was a thousand pities a refusal must be sent; but, alas! Goldthred had selected for his party a day fixed for one of those breakfasts in the vicinity of London at which everybody asked thinks it necessary to appear, while the uninvited decline other engagements, partly in hopes of a card at the last moment, partly that they may not publish their exclusion from this suburban paradise, to their friends.

It cost Helen some minutes' study to frame her refusal of Mr. Goldthred's invitation.

She was little in the habit of writing to gentlemen, and entertained grave doubts as to the manner in which a young lady ought to address her correspondents of the other sex. To begin "Sir" she considered decidedly too formal. "Dear Mr. Goldthred" would be too familiar. After spoiling two sheets of note-paper, she resolved that "Dear Sir" was the correct thing, and sat down to write her note accordingly, with a beating heart and an exceedingly good pen.

It was not Mr. Goldthred's invitation, how-

ever, that caused this derangement of Helen's circulation, that brought the light to her eyes, the colour to her cheeks. She had received Frank Vanguard's letter by the same post, and reading it, as she was forced to do, in the presence of the others, could scarce keep down a little cry of rapture and surprise at its contents. She walked away, indeed, to the window, so as to hide her face from her companions, and took the earliest opportunity of escaping to her own room, that she might devour it over and over again in solitude, but was presently drawn from that refuge by certain energetic housemaids, and compelled to return to the drawing-room without delay, inasmuch as the post left *The Lilies* again before luncheon. Such a letter as Frank's required an immediate answer, however short it might be, and Helen's was indeed of the shortest. She felt that until she had consulted her father, it was better not to pour out on paper the feelings thrilling at her heart. A very few words would serve to convey her sentiments in the meantime, so a couple of lines

were considered enough to let Frank know that, as far as the young lady herself was concerned, his proposals should be favourably entertained.

It was very provoking, to be sure, that papa was out of the way, and that his absence was of such doubtful duration; still he would surely approve when he learned all particulars, and a day or two did not seem long to wait after weeks of uncertainty and anxiety. All at once Helen felt as if she had known Captain Vanguard her whole life, and never cared a straw for any other creature on earth. Her heart leaped to think there was a chance of meeting him to-night at Lady Shuttlecock's. He would be sure to guess she was going. Of course he would be there!

So, with a quickened pulse, as I have said, but affecting much outward composure, Miss Hallaton daintily folded two neat little packets, and addressed them, notwithstanding her agitation, in a perfectly steady handwriting, to William Goldthred, Esq., and Captain F. Vanguard, respectively, each at the Cauliflower Club, St.

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... well
... finished
... the unusual signature
... instance of jealousy whispered that
... other letter **must** be from Frank Van-
guard.

Jin's face turned paler at the thought, but
it would confront a difficulty as soon
as he overcame it unscrupulously and
the matter employed, if it really
...
...
... great deal to see the

letter Helen read over half-a-dozen times under her very eyes, but how was that possible when it lay safely stowed away in the breast of a morning gown? No; the letter was doubtless out of reach, but she could get some information surely from its answer!

A walk before luncheon had been agreed on, at the instigation indeed of Miss Ross, who wanted her afternoon clear for a visit to Mrs. Mole. She was ready before the others; and while they were putting their bonnets on, ran downstairs with a jug of warm water, to the astonishment of the housemaid, who heard her say she was going to water some plants in the library. Then she fidgeted backwards and forwards from the hall to the drawing-room, and Mrs. Lascelles, coming out of the latter apartment, found her bending over the letter-box.

“What are you about, Jin?” said her friend. “Helen and I have been looking for you in the conservatory.”

“~~Only~~ posting my answer to Goldie,” replied with a laugh. “Don’t be jealous,

Rose. He'll show it to you, I'm sure, if you ask him."

But she seemed absent and pre-occupied during their walk, though more cordial and affectionate in her manner to Helen than she had ever been before.

CHAPTER XV.

BETWEEN CUP AND LIP.

NEVER in her life, perhaps, had Helen enjoyed anything so much as her afternoon's journey to London with Mrs. Lascelles. The smiling landscape on either side the railroad looked fairer, brighter, more like *home* than ever, when seen under a glow of celestial light radiating from a happy heart. For her, that seemed a glory, shining direct from paradise, which was to her companion but a glare of heat and discomfort, dazzling, scorching—worse, unbecoming in the extreme.

“It's good for the country, my dear, that's a comfort; but I'm sure it's fatal to one's complexion,” said Mrs. Lascelles, vainly endeavouring to combine the shelter of a blind with the

draught from an open window at forty miles an hour. "If they're to make hay when the sun shines, now's their time. How provoking! We shall have him in here. I *told* the guard we wanted this carriage to ourselves. Dear Helen, can't you look as if you'd got the mumps?"

But dear Helen was possibly not desirous of assuming so disfiguring a malady, for the unwelcome passenger put his head into their compartment, and, being a man of the world, sued in *formá pauperis* for an accommodation to which he was entitled by the purchase of his first-class ticket. He did *not* say, "I have as good a right here as you, having paid my fare;" but, lifting his hat, stepped quietly in with a smiling apology for disturbing them. "The train is so full," said he, "I cannot find room even second class. I hope I shall not be much in your way."

We all know how readily the sex are disarmed by cool audacity veiled under a respectful manner. The "odious creature" became "a pleasant gentleman-like man" on the spot, and Picard—for it was none other—so ingratiated himself

with the ladies that, when he left them at Paddington, they burst forth simultaneously in praise of his appearance, his manners, his whiskers, his white hat, everything that was his.

“Must be a foreigner,” declared Helen.
“He’s so well-bred!”

This, I have observed, is a favourite feminine fallacy, not to be exploded but by much continental travel in mixed society.

“Must be *somebody!*” chimed in Mrs. Lascelles. “I am sure I know his face. I think he drives a drag. I declare, Helen, I’ll bow to him if I meet him anywhere about.”

“So will I,” said Helen; and forgot his existence forthwith.

Was she not even now in the same town with Frank Vanguard—treading the same pavement, breathing the same air (and smoke)?

“We’ll have one turn for health in the Park,” said Mrs. Lascelles, as the two ladies seated themselves in her open carriage. “You know you’re in my charge to-day, Helen; and I mean to bring you out in what your papa calls

the 'best possible form.' To-night, dear, I'm determined you shall win all your engagements!"

So her stout and florid coachman, shaving the kerb-stone to an inch, turned under the Marble Arch at a liberal twelve miles an hour, which subsided into three before he reached Grosvenor Gate, and so, losing his identity in a double column of carriages, brilliant and glittering as his own, commenced the performance of that imposing function—grand, deliberate, and funeral—which is solemnized every lawful day in Hyde Park between six and half-past seven P.M. Barouches, sociables, tax-carts, Victorias, every kind of wheeled conveyance, were wedged three-deep in the road. All the chairs on the foot-way were occupied, and the path was blocked with walkers to the rails. Mounted policemen, making themselves ubiquitous, pranced about and gesticulated with unusual vehemence. Those on foot ferried passengers across the drive at intervals, majestically rebuking for that purpose the horse and his rider, the charioteer,

and the foaming, highly-bitted animal he controlled.

It was once said of London by a visitor, I believe, from Dublin, that "you could not see the town for the houses." Here, in this high tide of humanity, you could not see the people for the crowd.

"Not a soul in the Park!" observed Mrs. Lascelles, languidly scanning the myriads that surrounded her.

"I can't think where they get to," said Helen. "Nobody ever seems to come here that one knows."

But a vivid blush rose to her temples while she spoke. So becoming was its effect, that a young man, leaning against the rails, extricating his intellect for a moment out of vacancy, exclaimed to his companion—

"*Caramba!* Jack!"—he had once been at Gibraltar for a week, and piqued himself on swearing in Spanish—" *Caramba!* Jack! what a good-looking girl! Who is she?"

And Jack, never at a loss, detailed her private

history forthwith, identifying her as the daughter of a foreign minister, and furnishing his friend with a jaw-breaking German name, impracticable to pronounce, even had it been possible to remember. But the origin of this young lady's confusion occupied a position far beyond these pedestrian admirers, and was, indeed, none other than Frank Vanguard, taking the air on a very desirable hack amongst several equestrians of the season, but so partitioned off from Helen by dandies, dowagers, peers, commoners, and servants in livery, to say nothing of an iron railing, that, for all gratification to be obtained from his society, he might as well have been the other side of the Serpentine.

He saw her, though, that was some comfort. So did Mrs. Lascelles, confirming thereby into certainty the suspicions she entertained that Helen cherished a real affection for this captivating dragoon.

"She's a dear girl," thought that quick-sighted lady; "and Jin shall not interfere with her. He's tolerably well off. They might both

do worse; and Sir Henry would like it. Home, John !”

So, although Frank sent his hack along as fast as our police-regulations permit, in order to catch a glimpse of his charmer while she left the Park at Albert Gate, he was rewarded only with a back view of Mrs. Lascelles's carriage, ornamented by a boy and a basket taking a free passage to their next destination.

“Never mind,” thought the rider. “I can't miss seeing her to-night at Battledore House. We'll put it all right in the tea-room. I *think* she'll say, ‘Yes.’ Why shouldn't she? My darling, I'll make you as happy as ever I can.”

I wonder if the hack thought his master's caress at this moment was bestowed entirely for his own sake. He shook his dainty head as if he did, rolling his shoulders, and rising into one or two managed gambols, as he bore Frank homewards at a canter.

To meet one's lady-love at an exceedingly smart ball with the desperate intention of proposing to her then and there, ought to be excite-

ment enough, in all conscience, for any one day ; but, during the London season, people cram a week's work into twenty-four hours, and Frank had yet a good deal to do before he could find himself in that tea-room at Battledore House, to which he looked forward so longingly, and with the recesses of which his previous experience, I fear, had rendered him unjustifiably familiar.

A protracted mess-dinner to meet an illustrious personage must first be gone through. It would be impossible to leave the barracks till that personage gave the signal for breaking up ; and although a London ball is the latest of all festive gatherings, Frank, I think, was the only individual present, at an early hour of the morning, who felt anything but regret when the guest, who had thus honoured them, taking a kind and cordial farewell of his entertainers, announced himself ready to depart.

“If I can get there by two,” thought the young officer, “I may catch her before she leaves. It's just my luck to have tumbled into

this d——d thing, when I wanted to be elsewhere !”

Thus, you see, does one man undervalue privileges which another perhaps esteems the height of human felicity. Of all Thackeray's keen touches, there are none keener than that in which Lord Steyne says, “Everybody wants what they haven't got. 'Gad, I dined with the King yesterday, and we'd boiled mutton and turnips !”

“We're late, Frank,” said young Lord Kilgarron. “Jump into my brougham. It will get us there quicker than a cab. Battledore House, Tom. Drive like blazes !” The last to a smart lad in livery, who obeyed this injunction to the letter, as Lord Kilgarron leaped lightly in after his friend, and banged to the door.

“I *must* go,” added his lordship. “She's my aunt, you know. What's the *use* of an aunt, Frank ? I get very little good out of mine. Now a *grandmother's* a decent kind of relationship. Mine gave me the very mare we're

driving—half-sister to Termagant. She's a rum 'un, I can tell you!"

"A fast one, I see," remarked Frank, with much composure, considering they were now whirling past the lamps at a gallop.

"Is it fast?" demanded his companion, exultingly. "Wouldn't she have won the Garrison Cup at the Curragh last year, as sure as ever she was saddled, only the fools ran the race at a walk, and never began at all till the finish!"

Lord Kilgarron was a thorough Irishman, devoted to sport, reckless of danger, and possessing the knack, indigenous to his countrymen, of hitting off graphic description by a happy blunder.

"She can go," he added, "and she can stay. That mare, sir, would gallop for a week. Faith, an' she's running off now!"

She was, indeed! The Termagant blood, roused by contradiction and an injudicious pull at that side of her mouth which had not been rendered callous in training, rose to boiling pitch. Irritation, resentment, and fear of sub-

sequent punishment, combined to madden her. A frantic rise at her collar, a plunge, a lift of her shapely quarters, that only the strongest of kicking-straps prevented from dissevering the whole connection, and the mare was fairly out of her driver's hands, and swinging down Piccadilly with a brougham and two dandies behind her, almost as fast as she ever swept across the Curragh of Kildare.

“This is too good to last long,” observed Frank, as, shaving a lamp-post, they slued across the street, almost into the panels of a stationary cab, causing its driver to swear hideously in the vulgar tongue. “But it is the only chance of being in time!”

“We'll pull through, well enough, bar leaping!” answered the other, a touch of the brogue rising under excitement with mellow fluency to his lips. “Ye done it now, by the vestment!” he added, while half-sister to Ter-magant, cannoning from the broad wheel of an early vegetable waggon, against which she cut her shoulder to the bone, lost her foothold, and

fell with a crash on the slippery pavement, bursting every strap and buckle of her harness, smashing into fragments lamps, shafts, and splash-board, to bring the whole carriage, with its contents, atop of her in headlong confusion. "Hurt, Kil?" demanded Frank, rising from the footway, on which he had gone a shooter through the swinging door, over the entire person of his friend.

"Landed on my head!" answered Kilgarron, as esteeming the fact a sufficient assurance of safety. "Where's Tom?"

"Here, my lord," replied that invincible functionary, with a cut on his pate that, to use his master's expression, would have "bothered an Irishman." "I've got your lordship a cab." Tom having indeed hailed one of these peripatetic vehicles while in the act of regaining his feet to secure the mare from destructive struggles by kneeling on her head.

In such a thoroughfare as Piccadilly, assistance is to be found even at two in the morning. Ere long the mare was again on her legs, at least on

three of them. The brougham was being towed, like a dismayed wreck, into port; and the two passengers, having obtained clean water and the use of a clothes-brush in a chemist's shop, alighted from their cab at the door of Battledore House, "not a ha'porth the worse," as Kilgarron said, "an' fit to take the floor with the best of them!"

This young nobleman was proud of his dancing, pluming himself especially on a strict attention to time, which he called "humouring the tune."

But these untoward incidents befalling guests who were too late at any rate, brought their arrival to a period when most others were departing, and the ball seemed nearly over. Passing hastily through the crowd that always clusters about an awning, and hurrying up the cloth-covered steps with unseemly precipitancy, Frank became aware of his ill-luck when he heard the fatal announcement, "Lady Sycamore's carriage stops the way! Lady Sycamore coming out!"

Lady Sycamore was Helen's aunt and occasional chaperon. The Miss Planes, her ladyship's daughters, without pretension to beauty, were large, healthy, fresh-looking girls, of the dairy-maid style. Their mamma, wisely resolving that, whatever charms they did possess should be deteriorated as little as possible by bad air and want of sleep, invariably withdrew her charges from ball, drum, or concert at the earliest hour she could gather them under her wing.

Frank, entering the cloak-room to leave his paletot, found himself face to face with Helen coming into the hall.

For the first hour or two that night, Miss Hallaton had reaped a very fair harvest of admiration. Those who arrived later, and to whom she was pointed out as a beauty of the season, opined she was too pale, wanted freshness, brightness, and wore a very saddened expression for so young a girl. Lord Jericho, who danced his first quadrille with her, thought Miss Hallaton, without exception, the pleasantest company he ever came

across, and held forth next day at luncheon in praise of her beauty, wit, manners, originality, and good nature, till his sisters, the ladies Ruth and Rebecca Jordan, hated the very sound of her name. Whereas, Vere Vacuous (of the Foreign Office, with an inordinate opinion of the last-named individual), who took her to tea, considered Miss Hallaton "classical, perhaps—statuesque rather. All very well as long as she don't open her mouth; but dull, he should say; probably quite uneducated. Provincial; yes, that described her, he thought. Great want of animation, and much too pale!"

This last accusation he must have retracted could he have seen the blush that reddened Helen's cheek, when, coming suddenly out of the cloak-room on the person she had been expecting the whole evening, she almost butted her head into the tie of his neckcloth ere she could start back and take him calmly by the hand.

Frank never saw it. How should he? Neither of these young people quite understood all that

was going on in the other's heart ; and yet both were prepared to take the fatal plunge, and pass the rest of their lives together in the same element. Captain Vanguard, wonderful to relate, felt almost shy, and found himself strangely unobservant of everything but a beating in his temples, and a queer sensation about his diaphragm. Of course he would have denied it, but his own colour rose higher than usual, while Lady Sycamore, a portly person with vast scope for the laces, jewels, and other ornaments which decorated her before and behind, accosted him with exceeding graciousness, wondering volubly why he came so late ? Then he had to exchange friendly greetings with the Miss Planes, each of whom considered him an eligible partner for a waltz, a cotillon, or a lifetime. At the last moment too, Goldthred, who had a happy knack of committing ill-timed civilities, and such little social blunders, coming down stairs unoccupied, pounced on Miss Hallaton to put her into the carriage, thinking, no doubt, he was fulfilling his duty to everybody's satisfaction, and Frank

was forced to offer his arm to Lady Sycamore.

It was too provoking! Poor Helen could have cried; but, goaded to desperation, the moment Goldthred released her by the carriage-door, she contrived to drop her fan with so much energy, that it fell clattering on the steps at Frank Vanguard's feet.

He accepted the opportunity readily enough, and while he put it in her hand, their heads came very near together, under the inspection only of an approving linkman—more than half-drunk.

“Did you get my note?” she whispered, quick as lightning.

“No.”

“It's waiting for you. Thanks! Captain Vanguard. Good-night,” and disappearing in the gloomy vaults of the family coach, she rolled off through the darkness, leaving him standing on the steps at Battledore House,

“With a ghost-seer's look when the ghost disappears.”

“I hope your honour's enjoyed your ball,” said the linkman.

Frank started. He had never been up-stairs, nor even made his bow to Lady Shuttlecock. What had he to do with the ball?

Nevertheless, he put his hand in his pocket and gave the linkman half-a-crown.

CHAPTER XVI.

“A FACER.”

BUT Frank entertained no thoughts of returning to the scene of gaiety he had quitted on its very threshold. Stopping only to put a cigar in his mouth he turned, without a pang, from these “halls of dazzling light,” to walk slowly away through a succession of dark streets, like a man in a dream.

“It’s waiting for you!” Of course it was; and what a fool had he been not to inquire for his letters at the “Cauliflower” ere he dressed for dinner. She must have answered his proposal very quickly, he thought; couldn’t have taken time to consult papa, nor any one else; must have made up her mind in a moment—women always did. Was this a good omen or not? At each alternate lamp-post he changed his opinion. Here he argued, she had jumped at the offer the instant

it was made, loving him so dearly, and being so determined to marry him that it was needless to consult any one else on the subject; ten paces further on, he saw the other side of the question. If she meant to refuse him, it couldn't be done too quickly, and the less said about it the better. Such an answer would, of course, be sent by return of post; and, pre-occupied as he was, he found himself vaguely calculating the many deliveries of that valuable institution, speculating whether he could indeed have received her letter at his club, had he called for it so early as half-past seven o'clock.

Revolving this irrelevant consideration in his mind, Helen's beauty and confusion, as he saw her ten minutes ago, rose like a vision before his eyes, and he felt all joy and confidence once more. "Sure of winning!" he said out loud, with a puff of smoke into the hot, close night. "Cocksure, my boy, as if you'd got the race in your pocket!"

In two more streets he would reach the "Cauliflower," and his heart leaped wildly to think of

the dainty white missive, with its delicate superscription, even now awaiting him in the lobby of that caravanserai.

Quickening his pace, the sooner to end suspense, he came in sight of a figure lurching along the pavement some fifty yards ahead, with the gait of a man who, not in the least overcome by wine, is yet enough under its influence to walk more leisurely and with a more pretentious swing than usual.

He saw them by dozens every night of his life, and would have taken little notice of this convivial bird returning to roost, but that his attention was aroused by the scrutinizing manner in which two men, by whom he was himself overtaken at a quick walk, looked under the brim of his hat as they passed by. Returning their stare, he observed they were an ill-favoured couple enough, and that one shook his head as if dissatisfied, crossing the street forthwith to join a third figure that stole out of the shade cast by the opposite houses. Whatever might be their object, all three seemed now to join eagerly in chase.

Frank slackened sail to observe their movements, and was soon satisfied they were dogging the steps of the passenger ahead, who walked carelessly on in happy unconsciousness that he was watched or pursued.

These four, tracked and trackers, were pretty close together as they turned out of the main thoroughfare into a street, which several yards of high dead wall without lamps rendered one of the darkest in the West-End of London. Frank looked up and down for a policeman in vain. Not a soul was to be seen, and finding himself the only occupant of the pavement, he ran stealthily forward to the corner round which the others had lately disappeared, much mistrusting his assistance would be wanted without delay.

He was right. Already he could hear a scuffling of feet, a smothered oath, two or three blows exchanged, in short, sharp cracks like pistol-shots, while a hoarse voice muttered—

“Slip it into him, George! Would ye now? Take that—and that?”

Notwithstanding their numbers, however, the

ruffians seemed to have a hard bargain of their prey. The latter, with his back to the dead wall, fought like a wild cat, but three to one make short work, and in a couple of minutes he was overpowered, and down on his knee. Had his head touched the pavement, it might never have risen again, but at this critical juncture in leaped Frank Vanguard, like an Apollo who had learned to box. One remarkably straight left-hander doubled up the smallest assailant like the kick of a horse, while another sent the next in size staggering into the middle of the road, where he thought well to remain for a space, grasping his jaw with both hands, and blaspheming hideously. The biggest villain, shouting "Bobbies!" with an execration, and expressing his intention to "hook it," took to his scrapers, as he called them, at once, and was speedily followed by his equally cowardly auxiliaries.

Frank looked wistfully after the assailants, while he lifted their victim to his feet, exclaiming, with the utmost surprise, "Why, it's Picard!" as the dim light enabled him to identify that

gentleman, considerably mauled and disheveled, yet apparently not very seriously hurt.

Bleeding and breathless, Picard's presence of mind seemed, however, not to have deserted him. Before thanking Vanguard he felt for a parcel of notes in his breast-pocket, and laughed as heartily as aching bones and heaving lungs would permit.

"They've missed 'the swag,'" said he, wiping his bloody face with a cambric handkerchief, "and it's worth collaring, I can tell you. It's always my maxim to stick by the stuff; but if it hadn't been for *you*, 'squire, I must have caved out this spell, I estimate. It would have been a pity, too," he added, relapsing into the English language as he cooled down, "for, bar one at Baltimore, two years back, it's the best night I ever had in my life. 'Pon my soul, Vanguard, I'm heartily obliged to you; and how you hit out! Why, that dirty black-muzzled chap spun round as if he was shot."

"He's hurt my knuckles, the little beast!" said Frank, looking with much commiseration

at certain abrasions on a white and bony hand. "But what have you been about, my dear fellow; and how did they know you'd got money? Were you at all screwed?"

"Sober as a judge!" answered Picard. "In fact, a deal soberer than some judges I've seen down West in my time! I've been playing billiards ever since eleven o'clock, making game after game off the balls in a form you'd hardly believe. The fact is, I caught a flat, who thought he was a sharp! First he lost his money, then his temper. Of course he played on to get back both. I didn't win so very easy, you know; indeed I had rather a squeak for it more than once; but I always managed to nail him in the last break. Then we got to double or quits, and I needn't tell you how *that* went. He'd a friend, too, from the country, what you Britishers call 'a yokel,' I suspect, who backed his man handsome and paid up like the Bank of England. I drew this sportsman to a lively tune, I can tell you. Altogether I landed a hatful, and not a drop would I have to drink

till just before starting. I don't *think* they hocussed me; no, I've been hocussed before, and I know what it is. But their brandy was infernally strong, or the soda-water unaccountably weak, for somehow I felt so jolly I said I wouldn't have a cab, but walk home behind a weed.

“Now I think of it, there was a big, awkward-looking skunk loafing about the table most of the night, who never betted nor played, but seemed always on the watch, to see we didn't steal the chalk, as I supposed. I know better now. He sneaked out, I remarked, when I went for a cocktail. No doubt he watched me start off to walk, and followed with his pals. That's the gentleman who 'skedaddled' just now so freely when it came to a fight. Captain Vanguard, I say again, I'm infernally obliged to you!”

Frank, whose excitement had cooled down, was on thorns to receive his letter. “Have a cigar,” said he, proffering his case. “I fear I can't do anything more for you now. I'll see you

home, if you like, but I'm rather anxious to get to my club before they shut up. It's the 'Cauliflower,' you know. Almost in the next street."

"I live close by," exclaimed Picard. "We'll go together, and I hope you'll come and look me up at my rooms to-morrow. I've a few Yankee notions, and things I've got together knocking about Mexico and the States. They might amuse you, and I can give you a capital weed—nobody better; and you shall have the best I have, you shall! John Picard never yet forgot a good turn nor a bad one. You're the right sort, Captain, real grit; and you and me are mates for life. It's John Picard says so, and there's his hand upon it!"

Frank, who entertained a truly British horror of being thanked, would fain have escaped forthwith, but there was no avoiding the proffered hand; and it struck him also that his new friend reeled somewhat in his gait, talking the while more volubly and thicker than at first.

Resolving, therefore, to see him safely to his own door, and return as speedily as possible to

the "Cauliflower," he grappled his companion firmly by the arm, and steered him without difficulty along the now deserted pavement.

A couple of heavy blows on the head, with a strong squeeze of the throat, had served, no doubt, to intensify the effect of such villanous brandy as Picard imbibed before leaving the billiard-room in which he had been so successful. He said as much, admitting a certain influence on his physical powers, but repudiating, with suspicious jealousy, the idea that hard knocks or alcohol could in any way affect his brain.

"My boots are a little screwed," he observed, contemplating them with a gentle forbearance, "but my legs are right enough, and so am I. John Picard isn't a man, sir, to be upset by a drop of corn-brandy, nor a hug from a loafer like that. I'd have whipped him into Devonshire cream if I'd had a clear stage. How many were there now, according to your calculation? I tell ye fair, I was down (because these d—d boots chose to get drunk) before I'd time to count!"

"Only three," answered Frank, laughing, "and not a good man in the lot. They wouldn't have tried it on if we had been together; but your boots went so fast I couldn't catch them."

The other shook his head gravely. "Three," said he. "An' I hadn't even a tooth-pick."

"Tooth-pick!" repeated Frank in astonishment. "Lucky you hadn't—you'd have swallowed it!"

Picard being now arrived at that stage in which a man finds it impossible to make any statement, however trivial, without turning round and facing his companion, stopped short beneath a lamp-post, while he explained with great solemnity—

"A bowie-knife, about eighteen inches long, sharp on both sides, and weighted in the handle, is what *we* call a tooth-pick, young man, down Arkansas way. It's a neat tool—very—and balances beautiful. Some like them up the sleeve. I used to wear mine down the collar of my coat. That an' a six-shooter, if you're

pretty spry, will clear the kitchen smart enough in a general row. Down to Colorado now, I'd have laid those three loafers in the larder before you could say 'bitters.' And to think that to-night I shouldn't have had so much as a pencil case on me! How old Abe Affable would laugh if he came to hear of it. Poor old Abe! The last time I saw him he wanted to scalp a nigger for blacking his boots instead of greasing them. Well, well; different countries, different manners, and different drinks, no doubt. I like this country, Captain. After all, I'm a citizen of the world, but more a Britisher than anything else."

"Are we near your house now?" asked Frank, whose impatience made him almost wish he had left this citizen of the world to his fate.

"Next lamp-post but two," replied the other, with an unmeaning laugh. "Boots know where they are now, I do believe—would find their own way to the scraper if I was to pull 'em off, I'll lay a hundred. Here you are, Captain, latch-key sober, at any rate. You won't come

in? Well, perhaps it *is* late; good night, mate. One word before you cast off."

Poor Frank, chafing like an irritable horse at the starting-post, returned on his track, and Picard took hold of the lappet of his coat.

"I'll go back to Windsor with you," said he cordially. "I like Windsor, and I like *you*. I've reason to like both. Look here, Vanguard; there's something at Windsor that would have looked very queer if I'd been rubbed out just now; and I might have been, I don't deny it, but for you. Poor little chap, he's got nobody in the world but me! Perhaps that's why I'm so fond of him. I dare say Pharaoh's daughter thought there never was such a child as Moses when she pulled him out of the water. I know when I fished *my* boy out he put his chubby arms round my neck as if I'd been his father. Little rogue! I couldn't care more for him if he *was* my own, twenty times over.

"I'm a domestic fellow naturally, Vanguard, though I'm yarning to you now, under a lamp-post, at three in the morning. I've had a rough

time of it, one way and another. Not always fair play, I fancy. Sometimes I think I'm the biggest blackguard unhung. Sometimes I hope I'm not so much worse than my neighbours."

Frank was thoroughly good-natured.

"We'll talk that over to-morrow," said he; "in the meantime, good night."

"Good night," repeated the other. "I know what I say, Vanguard," he called out after his friend, while putting his latch-key in the lock; "and to prove it, I'll show you, my boy!"

"He must be very drunk," thought Frank, speeding down the street like a deer, "and I'm glad I came across him in the nick of time—there would have been mischief if those fellows had got at him alone."

In another moment, palpitating and breathless, he was on the steps of the "Cauliflower" Club, where, passing swiftly into the hall, he espied Goldthred reading a letter by gaslight, with an expression of countenance that denoted he was profoundly mystified by its contents.

This gentleman, strolling in to quench his

thirst after the glare, heat, worry, disappointment, and general penance of Lady Shuttlecock's ball, and running his eye as usual down the letter-rack, drew from the compartment “G” a laconic little epistle without signature, of which the second and third perusals bewildered him no less than the first—

“ If you are really in earnest,” so ran this mysterious document, “ come to-morrow, there is somebody to be consulted besides me.”

What could it mean? A lady's handwriting, to which he was an utter stranger. No name, no date, no monogram. “ Come to-morrow,” thought Goldthred. “ Certainly! But where? And when *is* to-morrow? It's ten minutes past three now. Oh! this can't be intended for *me!*”

Then he turned it upside down, backwards and forwards, inside out. The envelope was addressed correctly enough, Christian and surname in full, with even a flourish of calligraphy adorning his humble title of “ Esquire.” Many members of the “ Cauliflower ” would have pocketed the effusion without emotion, as a mere every-day

conquest of some anonymous admirer, but such a suspicion never entered Goldthred's honest head. In his utter freedom from self-conceit, this note puzzled him exceedingly; but to have believed it due to his own powers of fascination, would, in his loyalty to Mrs. Lascelles, have annoyed him still more.

The same letter-rack, low down, under "V," produced another epistle in a similar handwriting, which Frank snatched with eagerness from its place and pressed hungrily to his lips, as he rushed back into the street, feeling a strange suffocating necessity on him to read it in the open air. Earning an epicurean prolongation of pleasure, which most of us indulge in, by deferring its actual commencement, he walked some few paces on his homeward way ere he tore open the envelope, with a blessing on his lips for the girl he loved, and something like tears of gratitude, affection, and happiness starting to his eyes.

These started back again, however, and clustered like icicles round his heart, while

he read the following terse and explicit communication:—

“DEAR SIR,—

“I regret that a previous engagement will prevent my availing myself of your polite offer. I shall, of course, inform my father of your proposal when he returns.

“And remain,

“Yours sincerely,

“HELEN HALLATON.”

Frank clenched his fists and shut his teeth tight, for it *hurt* him. Hurt him very severely, though he scorned to wince or cry out, only smiling in anything but mirth, while he said aloud to the gas-lamps—

“I didn’t think she was such a bad one! Miss Ross is worth a dozen of her. O Helen, how *could* you!”

Perhaps in all his life he never loved her better than now, while he swore nothing should induce him to see nor speak to her again.

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